



Gaza Strip Situation Report - 6 February 2007

Vast increase in Gaza death toll

- Internal violence
- Humanitarian concerns
- Rafah crossing
- Context

Internal violence

At least 33 people were killed, four of them children, and 242 injured, during three days of clashes (1-3 February) between Palestinian security forces and armed Fatah militants on one side, and armed Hamas militants and the Executive Support Forces (ESF) on the other, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH). Half of those injured were civilian bystanders, according to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR). The latest casualty figures bring the total killed due to internal Palestinian violence in 2007 to 86, including 11 children, and the number of injured to 486. This figure compares to 146 dead in 2006, and 11 in 2005.

It is the second time in two weeks that the streets of Gaza have become no-go zones, with most people too frightened to leave their homes. These latest clashes have involved the closure of roads with cement blocks and garbage bins, and the setting up of impromptu check points by masked militants requesting people's identification papers. Gunmen have taken up sniper positions on the rooftops of high rise buildings, adding to the widespread fear among the Gaza Strip's 1.4 million residents.

Armed groups have targeted educational institutions and in particular, the Islamic University in Gaza city. Extensive damage has occurred to parts of the university including the library where 3,000 reference books were reportedly destroyed. Elsewhere, offices of the Al Quds Open University were damaged in arson attacks in Gaza city and Rafah on 2 and 3 February respectively.

On 2 February, Palestine Labour Voice radio station staff in Jabalia were forced to leave at gunpoint, before their offices were looted and ransacked. On the same day, gunmen entered the Gaza Municipality compound and damaged up to 35 vehicles and stole tools and equipment.

Humanitarian concerns

If the current violence continues, the following humanitarian concerns are expected to worsen:

- *Access to education.* UNRWA schools closed in the northern Gaza Strip and Gaza city on 3 February and in Gaza city on 4 February. While the schools reopened in Gaza city on 5 February, there were high levels of pupil absenteeism due to the unwillingness of parents to allow their children to leave the home. Ministry of Education schools remain closed for the second successive week due to the winter shut down.
- *Freedom of movement.* Clashes in the middle area of the Gaza Strip blocked the only two roads linking Gaza city to the south – Salah ed Din street and the coastal road - preventing north south movement. Many taxis and buses ceased to operate.
- *Economic consequences.* As people were unwilling to go to work due to the intensity of violence, many public sector offices and private businesses closed, hampering the delivery of essential services and commercial enterprise.



- *Essential service provision:*

PRCS ambulances were targeted by militias in two separate incidents in Gaza city on 3 February. In both cases, ambulances were hit by gun fire and the vehicles and crew searched by militants. On 2 February, a paramedic working for the MoH Medical Military Services was seriously injured after being caught in cross fire. This disregard for the Red Crescent mandate is consistent with violations observed in the Gaza Strip between 25 and 29 January.

WHO reported no major interruptions to health services in spite of intermittent clashes in and around Shifa hospital in Gaza city. Most hospital staff remained on site, ensuring continuity of service. Such an arrangement however, is not sustainable.

Garbage collection largely ceased in Gaza city during the three days due to the damage caused to Municipality vehicles and violence. Prolonged fighting inhibiting garbage collection could become a public health concern.

- *Shortages of essential medicines and consumables.* The high number of casualties has put a heavy demand on items such as dressings and blood products. MERLIN has provided 4,000 blood test kits to the MoH which are expected to last two weeks. CARE plans to bring in an additional 3,000 blood bags from the West Bank. ICRC has provided dressing sets to the MoH. Any prolonged period of violence will increase demands for acute trauma consumables and anesthetics.
- *International organisations.* No UN agencies were able to open their offices on 4 February. By the end of the weekend the UNRWA field office was littered with bullets from the fighting taking place at the Islamic University close by. Internal violence is widespread geographically and unpredictable. There is a significant risk of being caught in crossfire and kidnapping. In such an unstable environment, international agencies may further downsize their teams, reducing capacity to respond to a deteriorating humanitarian situation.

- *Psychological.* There is an increasing sense of hopelessness and powerlessness felt among Gazans exacerbated by the inability to leave the Gaza Strip at will.
- *Shortages of essential food supplies.* There were no food shortages. Karni has remained open daily since 25 January for commercial and humanitarian supplies. However, many shops and supermarkets closed during the clashes.

Rafah Crossing

Rafah crossing opened this morning for movement in both directions but was closed again at 11.45am. As Rafah crossing had not been open for departures since 8 January, between 10,000 and 12,000 people had gathered to try and leave Gaza. As frustration built up over the course of the morning, a group of up to 500 people stormed the crossing, forcing the EUBAM monitors to leave the terminal.

Context

Violence erupted in the middle area of Gaza on Thursday 1 February when a combined force of Hamas and the ESF intercepted a number of containers transported from southern Gaza. The contents of the containers remain in dispute with Hamas alleging they contained weapons destined for the Presidential Guards (PG) and Fatah maintaining that they contained logistics supplies. No independent verification has been forthcoming. Four members of the PG were killed in this attack and 34 others injured, including 14 bystanders, among them seven children (PCHR). A 41 year-old woman caught in the cross fire died of her wounds the following day.

A number of assaults by armed Hamas militants and the ESF continued across the northern Gaza Strip and Gaza city with the focus of the attacks being installations belonging to Military Intelligence, the National Security Forces, General Intelligence, PGs and Preventive Security. In one attack at a PG training compound in Sheikh Ajleen area south of Gaza city on 3 February, six trainees aged between 20 and 23 were killed.