

Palestine, conflict

Global ETC Teleconference #08

Date: 18/12/2023 Time: 13:02 UTC

Further information related to the ETC Palestine operation can be found on the website:

www.etcluster.org/emergency/palestine-conflict

For more information, or to be added or deleted from the mailing list, please contact:

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Attendance

Chair (ETC)

ACTED
ACF Spain
CDAC Network
CRS

Ericsson Response
FAO
Government of Luxembourg

ICRC

Impact Initiatives - REACH
IOM
INTERNEWS
IRC
ITU

Map-UK
MedGlobal
Medicos del Mundo (MdM) Spain
Medical Aid for Palestinians
Meedan
NetHope

Office of the Quartet (Palestine)

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Kylie Garner
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Roland Nurenberg
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Raphael Bacot
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Stijn Aelbers
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OXFAM
Save the Children

UNHCR
UNICEF

UNFPA
UNOCHA

UNOPS

UNRWA

USAID

Global ETC

WFP

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Agenda

1. Situation update
2. Global ETC update
3. Partner updates
4. AOB

Minutes

1. Situation update

- The military operation is intensifying and fighting continues throughout Gaza, especially in the southern Gaza Strip. There have been several communications blackouts on the ground and the situation remains difficult for fuel supplies to maintain the network.
- Discussions are ongoing about opening an additional corridor from Kerem Shalom to Gaza via the Israeli side, but this has not yet been officially confirmed. So far, humanitarian aid entry into Gaza continues to be through Egypt, with the Egyptian Red Cross (ERC) remaining the sole consignee of goods.

2. Global ETC update

Coordination/equipment

- The ETC is currently coordinating and engaging with 31 organizations—11 United Nations (UN) agencies, 16 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), two government partners, and two private sector partners—in the Gaza conflict emergency response.
- The ETC has presented their activity to the Logistics Cluster and engaged with their [IMPACCT](#) initiative on customs importation. A workshop was held in Cairo to engage with the Egyptian authorities on humanitarian goods and explore possible processes to address the challenges related to importing telecommunications equipment.
- The ETC continues to engage with the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) on the items that would be required to provide shared services to humanitarian actors on the ground. To date, no items on the list have been authorized to be imported and use.
- ETC has been engaging with REACH who had conducted a communication and information needs assessment that can be used to inform program cluster organizations on their activities. The methodology involved conducting a secondary data review, focusing on the primary technologies and information sources used by Gaza population prior to the conflict. The assessment will also look at the challenges in accessing information, the impact of communication limitations on aid and services, and expected information needs of populations, since 07 October. A report will be produced with recommendations for decision-makers and share shortly.
- The ETC is considering the possibility to enhance the Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) radio security communications system (SCS) in Egypt. ERC are licensed to operate VHF radio SCS in Egypt and are the sole consignee for goods and equipment importation into Gaza, through the Rafah Border crossing. ERC asked the ETC to support with radio communication equipment to use in Egypt. The ETC has requested ERC to provide a detailed account of their needs to revert on feasibility of the project.

Staffing

- The ETC continues to explore information that all international staff who enter Egypt from Gaza have a maximum of 72 hours (three days) to depart Egypt. No staff has yet been affected by this to ETC team knowledge. The WFP RBC Protocol unit is seeking full information on this matter from the appropriate Egyptian authorities.

- The Global ETC Deputy Coordinator—Caroline Teyssier—who deployed to Cairo on 03 December continues to support the coordination of ETC activities in the emergency response until 19 December. The dedicated ETC Coordinator—Hossam Metwally—based in Cairo, will continue coordinating ETC activities, while waiting for issuance of entry documents to deploy and be based in Jerusalem.
- ETC Operations Specialist—Komi Amedjonekou—will take over from Caroline as of 18 December starting remotely, while waiting for entry visa issuance to deploy to Jerusalem tentatively after 27 December.
- Mufaro Masuka—ETC Information Management Officer—deployed to Cairo on 21 November to support the Information Management (IM) and reporting activities in the Gaza emergency response until 19 December. Mufaro will continue to remotely support the response until a replacement is identified through the WFP stand-by partnerships network.
- FITTEST ICT Specialist—Burak Sezgin—deployed to Jerusalem on 13 December to fill ETC gaps while requesting extension of his visa prior to enter Gaza. Deployment to Gaza is tentatively now scheduled for 27 December or 01 January 2024 for an initial technical engagement with local actors, to plan an initial needs assessment, and to set up technical coordination processes for the response.

Communications services

- The ETC has followed up on COGAT's request to provide additional information on who will use the 20 Iridium satellite phones, and whether there is a possibility to remotely deactivate them in case they get lost. COGAT authorized the importation of the satellite phones into Gaza, on the condition that they are purchased locally, using the telecommunications provider—Gilat Telecom. The phones were donated to the UNDSS who hand-carried them into Gaza on 12 December. The UNDSS is coordinating with the Area Security Management Team (ASMT) to distribute the devices to humanitarian responders in critical need. Information on each assignee for each device has to be reported to COGAT.
- The ETC reminded all that purchasing locally does not grant automatically authorization to use and import telecommunications equipment. The same process through COGAT applies. .
- COGAT has proposed to the cluster and UN agencies to procure Cellcom SIM cards for use by humanitarian staff in Gaza. Cellcom is an Israeli MNO which offers voice and possibly data connectivity services that can be used in Gaza. The use of Cellcom SIM cards is technically cleared by Shabak—the Israeli national security agency—and the service authorized for use by all humanitarian staff. The mobile phone serial numbers, SIM card information, and assignee for each phone would have to be shared with COGAT and Shabak if agencies choose to use this option. The offer was circulated on 10 December by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) office to all heads of agencies highlighting the risk of compromising UN operational independence. The ETC, UNDSS, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) are collecting feedback from organizations and will then propose a way forward. To date, three UN agencies confirmed their interest in procuring the SIM cards. The ETC will follow up to

send a reminder to UN agencies to engage with their heads of country operations if interested in the service. The service is only suggested to UN agencies for now but could potentially be extended to accredited NGOs. The Palestinian Office of the Quartet¹ highlighted that MNOs need to get approval from the regulation authorities to broadcast to other countries, meaning that Cellcom would need to be authorized to do so by the Palestinian Telecommunications Authority, which they do not have. Currently the only bandwidth they have is some spillover available from before the conflict.

- The Palestinian Office of the Quartet stated that MNOs in Gaza currently have a 12% network working capacity. No official statistics are available for landlines and Internet Service Providers (ISPs), but they are equally experiencing challenges due to damages to the telecommunications infrastructure. The need to restore Palestinian services remains crucial. There is concern that, if the Israeli Ministry of Communications provides coverage in Gaza, this will undermine all current Palestinian telecommunications operators. This challenge should be raised with COGAT, as Palestinian providers, such as Paltel and Jaweel, are unable to restore services because they cannot get the necessary materials, access to sites to repair damages and lack enough fuel to power the network to full capacity.
- Damage registration is very difficult at this stage, and Israel vetoes the entry of dual-use equipment, including telecommunications equipment, hindering the resumption of Palestinian services. The World Bank, European Union, and the UN are engaging for joint efforts to carry out a rapid damage and needs assessment with funding from the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO).
- UNDSS engaged the Israeli authorities in November to get authorization to finalize the launch of the digital radio-based security communications system (SCS)—which was 90% complete at the onset of the conflict. Two repeaters—one in Khan Yunis and the other in Rafah—were functional when the system was reactivated on 03 December. Each repeater is equipped with a battery backup to operate for a maximum of two hours. On 13 December the Khan Yunis repeater site broke down due to a suspected power outage and is currently inaccessible for maintenance work because of the prevailing insecurity. The Rafah repeater is partially operational and connected to a local clinic power system, which relies on a generator running only from 09:00 to 13:00 from Sunday to Thursday. UNDSS colleagues have identified power as the primary challenge at the Rafah repeater site. An independent power solution such as a solar system is needed for this site.
- Although the digital radio communication network is not yet fully functional, the Jerusalem server room is functional, and the radios can be programmed there. Information is currently being gathered on how many radios are left with each agencies and whether they are digital or analogue. Consideration is also being given to increasing the number of licenses, as 110 have been approved so far and efforts are being made to increase this to 550, to meet the increased need. This system has been pre-approved by COGAT, making it a priority to be implemented as a primary backup system. The analogue radio network, which formed the parallel network, is no longer operational due to its destruction.

¹ <https://www.quartetoffice.org/index.php>

- Clarification was also provided on the choice of digital radio communication, based on some requests, as the standard in emergencies is analogue, to ensure compatibility among UN agencies. However, considering the country context, the accessibility, approval and feasibility to date, the digital system which was approved in 2017 with the agencies in the field and was about to be launched this year, it was determined to be the best possible option at this stage. The ETC will still consider re-establish the analogue network in coordination with UNDSS where feasible.

3. Partner Updates

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

- The International Telecommunication Union (ITU)— will coordinate with the ETC to distribute 100 fully activated Thuraya satellite phones in Egypt to UN agencies operating in the Gaza emergency response. The satellite phones were donated by the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and are fully paid for. The phones are yet to be temporarily imported into Egypt, once approved and authorized by both the Egyptian and Israeli authorities. UN agencies will be invited to submit expressions of interest, stating quantity of phones needed and justification—through an online survey. Phones will also be allocated on a ‘first come-first served’ basis. Agencies should also be prepared to assist in the importation process of the satellite phones. The ETC and ITU cannot guarantee that every agency will receive the requested number of satellite phones. The ETC and ITU intend to follow the required procedures and authorization from both the Egyptian and Israeli authorities and seeks similar collaboration from interested agencies.

4. AOB

The next teleconference will be held on Wednesday 27 December 2023 at 13:00 UTC.

13:00 UTC
14:00 Rome
15:00 Cairo/Jerusalem
17:00 Dubai

Acronyms

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
ACF	Action Against Hunger / Action contre la Faim
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
COGAT	Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories
GSMA	Global System for Mobile Communications
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM	International Organization for Migration

IRC	International Rescue Committee
IM	Information Management
IMO	Information Management Officer
ISP	Internet Service Provider
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MNO	Mobile Network Operator
MTIT	Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications & Information Technology
RDNA	Rapid damage and needs assessment
TRA	Telecommunications Regulatory Authority
UNDSS	United Nations Department for Safety and Security
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VHF	Very High Frequency
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Minutes: Mufaro Masuka, Global ETC Information Management Officer.