

Palestine, conflict

Global ETC Teleconference #17

Date: 20/03/2024 Time: 13:00 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 (50)

Chair (ETC)	Brent Carbno
Access Now	Ben Grazda Marwa Farafta
ACTED	Héloïse Vacheret
Action Against Hunger (ACF)	Maya Papotti
Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)	Rakesh Bharania
CADUS	Ulrich Reichel
Cisco	Kevin Murphy Matt Altman
Ericsson Response	Lars Ruediger
ETC Global	Caroline Teyssier Komi Amedjonekou Lena Bock Mufaro Masuka Phyza Jameel
ETC Palestine	Bipin Jha Burak Sezgin David Pickering Hossam Metwally
Global Communities	Shahd Mohndes
Government of Luxembourg	Roland Nurenberg
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	Claudiu Mateescu
International Rescue Committee	Alan Mooney Moayyad Fares
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)	Adel Darwish Inga Rimkeviciene Muli Newton Mustafa Ahmed Ali Al Mahdi
Internews Network	Stijn Aelbers
MedGlobal	Mohamed EIDakroory
Medical Aid for Palestinians	Sam Wahlstrom
NetHope	Anja Delaquis

Save the Children UNICEF	Lour Kuttab Jalal Tamimi Nabiha Faruqui
UNESCO UNOCHA	Jackson Krainer Amal Husein
UNOPS UNSCO	Mikkel Brodersen Dalibor Marinic Javed Hussan Lukasz Cyra
UN Women USAID/BHA	Hisham Obaid Patrick Hassan
US Department of State WFP	Joseph K Burton Alawi Ahmed Angel Buitrago Aramais Alojants Mostafa Ghaly
WHO	Hani Dodin Bilal Tamimi

Agenda

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

Minutes

1. Situation update

- Significant obstacles such as such as limited entry points, complicated border controls, difficult road conditions, high tensions and desperation currently hinder the sustained scale-up of aid into and across Gaza, according to the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator.
- Intense Israeli bombardment and ground operations as well as heavy fighting between Israeli forces and Hamas armed groups continue to be reported across much of the Gaza Strip, particularly in Deir al Balah and areas surrounding Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza city. This has resulted in further civilian casualties, mass displacement (over 75% of the population have been internally displaced across the Gaza Strip – some multiple times), and destruction of houses and other civilian infrastructure.
- The capacity of humanitarian agencies to operate safely and effectively anywhere in Gaza remains heavily compromised by recurrent denials of access to the north, restrictions on the import of critical equipment, and recurrent intense hostilities.
- Voice services from Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) Jawwal and Ooredoo are operational in Rafah, although the network is congested due to increased users and few

operational telecommunications towers, due to fuel allocation limitations. The internet services from both MNOs are non-operational in Gaza. This situation pre-existed before the onset of conflict on 07 October 2023.

- Paltel and Ajyal Internet Service Providers (ISPs) resumed internet services in parts of Rafah and Deir al Balah, though with intermittent connectivity, significantly affecting humanitarian responders to access critical information for delivering lifesaving aid.
- Iridium and Thuraya satellite phone voice services are operational across the Gaza Strip.

2. Global ETC update

Coordination/equipment

- The ETC continues to engage, coordinate, and support all humanitarian local actors, UN agencies, and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) in Gaza with technical needs and advice to ensure that the limited communications resources on the ground are utilized effectively.
- Since 09 January, with presence of ETC staff in Gaza, the ETC has conducted 20 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) assessments in 15 locations and supported 18 humanitarian agencies with repairs, technical advice, and guidance on the use of ICT equipment and services.
- Due to the staff ceiling and rotations in Gaza, the ETC did not have any presence in Gaza for three weeks. The ETC is remotely coordinating its activities from Cairo, and the ETC Telecommunications Specialist redeployed to Gaza on 18 March to assist partners with technical support and guidance.
- The ongoing limited access to internet connectivity in Gaza restricts coordination to face-to-face meetings at the Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC) with limited online collaboration and engagement among partners and agencies operating remotely.
- COGAT has streamlined the importation approvals process for technical equipment into Gaza through the availability of an online form to be completed by organizations intending to import equipment.

Internet connectivity

- The ETC is collaborating with OCHA to seek COGAT approval for solutions to strengthen the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) signals of telecommunications service providers in Gaza, particularly in anticipation of the humanitarian response expanding further to the north with the population movement.
- The ETC is engaging with OCHA and WFP Palestine to secure approval from COGAT to import Starlink terminals for internet connectivity in Gaza. An ETC letter requesting approval of Starlink terminals will be shared with COGAT through OCHA for advocacy and approval from COGAT. Previously, a UAE field hospital in Gaza received Starlink approval, indicating a successful precedence.

Telephony

- Connectivity to available Israeli mobile networks (authorized for use in Gaza) continue to be repeatedly deactivated upon reactivation. The ETC, through WFP in Palestine is following up with COGAT to identify the issue and possible solutions.

Security Communications Systems (SCS)

- On 20 March, the ETC visited the VHF radio repeater site at Al Shaboura Clinic in Rafah to conduct an internet connectivity assessment, aiming to establish a connection with the UNDSS server in Jerusalem. The technical assessment revealed configuration issues in the router. The ETC is engaging with UNDSS Jerusalem and Paltel ISP to identify the issue and explore viable solutions for its resolution. Previously, on 25 February, the ETC successfully implemented a solar power solution at this site, which was confirmed during the assessment to be operational, ensuring uninterrupted 24/7 operations.
- As of 21 February, the latest damage mapping shared by partners has revealed that the VHF repeater sites in Gaza City and Jabalia are still standing, while the repeater site in Khan Yunis has been damaged. The ETC is planning to conduct physical assessments at these sites to make informed recommendations, depending on when safe access can be secured. The dates for the assessments are yet to be scheduled.
- The 30 digital VHF handheld radios approved for importation by COGAT have received export approval from the authorities in the UAE for WFP Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team (FITTEST) to ship them from their warehouse in the UAE. They are now ready for dispatch to Jerusalem. The ETC is collaborating with COGAT through OCHA to secure a certificate of approval to ensure the swift release of the 30 pre-approved radios upon their arrival at Tel Aviv Airport. The ETC continues to engage UNDSS in Jerusalem to coordinate the arrival, configuration, assignment of call signs, and the distribution process of the 30 VHF radios upon their arrival in Gaza.
- The results of the SCS needs survey carried out from 06 to 14 March have been analysed and the findings will be shared with UNDSS to prioritize how the 30 VHF handheld radio will be distributed to UN agencies upon their arrival in Gaza.

Staffing

- There are currently four dedicated ETC staff deployed in the response. Due to the reduction of UN staff footprint in Gaza, the ETC Coordinator has resumed his role remotely based in Cairo since 08 March, with a scheduled plan to deploy to Gaza on 25 March. The ETC Deputy Coordinator continues to support the response while based in Cairo. The ETC Telecommunications Specialist re-deployed to Gaza on 18 March to assist partners with technical support and guidance, with schedule plan to travel out of Gaza on 25 March for a short break. The Information Management Officer (IMO) continues to support the response while based in Cairo.

Funding

- The ETC remains 64 per cent funded out of the US\$800,000 requested in the Flash Appeal to undertake its coordination and information management activities to address the immediate needs in Gaza. The current Palestine Flash Appeal expires on 31 March. The revised Flash Appeal, incorporating ETC's budget requirement of US\$1.8 million until 31 December 2024, has been finalized and submitted to UNOCHA on 16 March.

Challenges

- The reduction of staff presence in Gaza has posed challenges for face-to-face meetings and coordination activities, exacerbated by the existing internet connectivity issues across Gaza.

- Limited access to electricity, fuel, and telecommunications services continues to impede the humanitarian response in Gaza. Importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is prolonged and extremely challenging.
- The risk of cybersecurity issues in this emergency is considered extremely high. Caution in using technology platforms applies, including the use of social media and press platforms.
- Access to some locations for communication assessments and coordination is extremely challenging, and fuel to power telecommunications infrastructure remains scarce.

3. Partner Updates

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

- The ICRC highlighted the existence of a network of analogue radios prior to the onset of the crisis in Gaza in October 2023. Recent approval for the procurement of analogue repeaters was received from COGAT following the Palestine ICRC building damage during the conflict. The analogue repeater was purchased locally from Jerusalem.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

- OCHA highlighted the efforts being made for community engagement, particularly in enhancing connectivity for the most vulnerable children, women, youth, elderly persons with disabilities and those with chronic diseases, to access humanitarian services offered online, which requires mobile phones and internet connectivity.
- In response to these efforts, OCHA has received commitments from both MNOs, Jawwal and Ooredoo, to support with the SIM cards to help most vulnerable people to access predefined helpline numbers for humanitarian services. OCHA, in collaboration with UNICEF, is piloting the initiative next week, with an initial provision of 10 mobile phones provided by UNICEF and SIM cards provided by MNOs aiming to increase connectivity for the most vulnerable people to access humanitarian services and complaint channels.

WFP Regional Bureau Cairo (RBC)

- WFP RBC continues to support WFP Palestine operations with the introduction of a new technology, Community Cloud Communication (CCC) solution to manage communications channels with the affected population. A Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) trunk voice connectivity to the new solution has been successfully finalized for inbound calls, with outbound activation currently under progress by Paltel and Jawwal. This initiative aims to broaden the scope of available communications channels, including voice, live chat, and a self-service menu-based bot, enabling affected populations to easily access WFP assistance, enhancing the Community Feedback Mechanism (CFM).

4. AOB

- N/a

The next teleconference will be held on Wednesday 03 April 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
CCC	Community Cloud Communication
COGAT	Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories
ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
FITTEST	Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team
GSM	Global System for Mobile Communications
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ISP	Internet Service Provider
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MNO	Mobile Network Operator
RBC	Regional Bureau Cairo
SCS	Security Communications Systems
SIP	Session Initiation Protocol
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNSCO	United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process
VHF	Very High Frequency
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Minutes: Bipin Jha, ETC Palestine Information Management Officer.