

## Palestine, conflict

Global ETC Teleconference #21

Date: 28/05/2024 Time: 13:00 UTC

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

[www.etcluster.org/emergency/palestine-conflict](http://www.etcluster.org/emergency/palestine-conflict)

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

[Palestine.ETC@wfp.org](mailto:Palestine.ETC@wfp.org)

## Attendance (29)

Chair (ETC)	Caroline Teyssier
Access Now	Ben Grazda Giulio Coppi
ACTED	Emma Ropars
Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)	Lindah Khabeko Rakesh Bharania
ETC Global	Lena Bock Mufaro Masuka
ETC Palestine	Khawar Ilyas Burak Sezgin
Government of Luxembourg	Roland Nurenberg
Humanity and Inclusion (HI)	Chloe Perron
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	Claudiu Mateescu
International Rescue Committee (IRC)	Alan Mooney Amro Al Moghraby Moayyed Fares
Office of the Quartet	Enas Abu Laban Lour Kuttab
Terre des hommes Lausanne (TDH)	Ahcene Ait-Eldjoudi
UNESCO	Jackson Krainer
UNOCHA	David Padi
UNOPS	Mikkel Brodersen
US State Department	Joseph Burton
WFP	Aramais Alojants Fady Tadrous Ozdzan Hadziemin Roberto Dattili Sami Alio
WHO	Bilal Tamimi

## Agenda

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

## Minutes

### 1. Situation update

#### Security

- The security situation in Gaza remains volatile and intense due to the continuing hostilities. Ground incursions and heavy fighting also continue to be reported, in Jabalia, south of Gaza city, northern An Nuseirat, eastern Deir al Balah, and eastern and central Rafah.
- Humanitarian operations in Gaza continue to face severe humanitarian access restrictions, including the ongoing closure of key border crossings, denial of planned missions, delays in movements imposed by the authorities, and recurrent intense hostilities. As of 28 May, all UN agencies and other humanitarian responders must submit a movement request to Israeli authorities and are only allowed to travel within and to/from Gaza when request is officially authorized. This has significantly affected the operations and implementation of life-saving activities by humanitarian responders on the ground.
- As of 28 May, the Rafah border crossing remains closed since 06 May. Humanitarian agencies' staff movement in and out of Gaza is only possible through the Kerem Shalom border crossing, transiting through Jerusalem to Amman, Jordan, using humanitarian road traffic convoys.
- The increased intensity of the Rafah incursion has forced UN agencies and other humanitarian responders to reduce staff presence in Rafah and relocate most personnel to Deir Al Balah. Only the essential staff—mostly logistics personnel—are the only ones who have remained in Rafah.
- As part of the relocation, the joint humanitarian operations meetings have also been moved from Rafah to Deir Al Balah to reduce the footprint of humanitarian responders and ensure staff safety.

#### Telecommunications

- Voice services provided by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational at very low capacity due to limited fuel, very few operational telecommunications towers, congested network, and lack of spare parts to repair and maintain the remaining network. Fuel shortages have resulted in the MNOs shutting down some of the telecommunications towers.
- The closure of the Rafah border crossing since 06 May is significantly affecting the importation of fuel for use by MNOs and other critical live-saving organizations.

According to the Office of the Quartet, the MNOs have been intermittently receiving the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)-agreed daily fuel allocation of 18,000 litres since 06 May, thereby creating a shortage that led to the shutting down of some critical telecommunications towers.

- Internet connectivity remains a primary communications challenge across the Gaza Strip and is worsening as displaced people relocate from the now volatile security situation in Rafah to their original locations in the north. Internet Service Providers (ISPs)—Paltel and Ajyal—are providing internet services in parts of Rafah, Deir Al Balah, Jabalia, and Gaza City, though with repair challenges and limited resources to strengthen the services.
- Due to the prevailing escalated hostilities, the local MNOs and ISPs are experiencing network outages from damaged infrastructure, limited access to fuel, scarcity of spare parts, and insecure conditions to carry out repairs. The current conditions make it difficult to maintain the remaining functional network. Critical telecommunications importation processes remain lengthy and restricted.
- Although Iridium and Thuraya satellite phone voice services are operational across the Gaza Strip, Thuraya services were reportedly disrupted following the Yhasat satellite failure in April. The company is working on restoring the services.

## 2. Global ETC update

### Coordination

- The ETC coordinator—Khawar Ilyas—previously based in Cairo, arrived in Rafah on 24 May and relocated to Deir Al Balah on 28 May, in line with the aim to reduce the UN staff footprint in Rafah. Khawar will coordinate ETC activities and support humanitarian actors operating in Gaza while based in Deir Al Balah.

### Internet connectivity

- Internet connectivity across Gaza has been vastly reduced in capacity with recurrent fluctuating service provision in both Rafah and Deir Al Balah. Most humanitarian responders are now stationed in Deir Al Balah. The ETC is engaging the local ISP—Ajyal—to prioritize the strengthening of internet connectivity services in areas where humanitarians have settled in Deir Al Balah, following the relocation from Rafah.
- OCHA is currently connected to the local ISP—Ajyal—through the UNRWA offices in Deir Al Balah for internet services. The connectivity speeds are reportedly slow and the ETC plans to engage WFP HQ for support with three dedicated FortiGate firewall devices to boost the internet connectivity speeds.
- The local ISP is also facing multiple challenges that include reduced staffing and lack of spare parts to repair and maintain the remaining network service.

### Security Communications Systems (SCS)

- The ETC is engaging and collaborating with the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) to set up the proposed interim manned Security Operations Centre (SOC) in Jerusalem to monitor personnel location during field missions in Gaza to ensure their safety. The SOC will be equipped with basic communications devices that include satellite phones and mobile phones for staff to directly communicate with while on mission in Gaza. The ETC is currently engaging local vendors in Jerusalem to

ascertain the availability of the required equipment for setting up the SOC.

- The 30 pre-approved Very High Frequency (VHF) digital radios imported from Dubai and handed over to UNDSS in Jerusalem on 14 May were successfully programmed and assigned call-signs on 28 May at the UNDSS Jerusalem server. The ETC is now engaging the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) to import the 30 VHF radios into Gaza for use by humanitarian responders.
- The ETC requested ISP—Paltel—to visit the VHF radio repeater site in Deir Al Balah on 29 May to check and resolve the data connectivity status and enable communication between the site and the UNDSS server in Jerusalem.
- The service provider who designed, installed, and deployed the VHF network in Gaza informed the ETC that they have identified the technical challenge which is currently blocking the connection between the VHF repeater site in Deir Al Balah and the UNDSS server in Jerusalem. The challenge will be resolved once data connectivity is enabled at the repeater site in Deir Al Balah.

### Access to information for communities

- The project to establish FM broadcasting services to provide access to information for communities in Rafah has not made further progress due to the current hostilities and heightened security situation as organizations prioritize staff safety and secure storage of equipment. First Responder Radio and UNICEF have imported and prepositioned in Rafah all accessories except the transmitter to set up an FM broadcasting service for this project. The ETC will engage with humanitarian partners to provide guidance and support for public messaging and access to information for communities in Gaza once the FM broadcasting tool is set up.

### Staffing

There are currently four ETC staff engaged in the response:

- The ETC coordinator previously based in Cairo arrived in Rafah on 24 May and relocated to Deir Al Balah on 28 May, in line with the reduction of the UN staff footprint in Rafah. The coordinator will coordinate ETC activities and support humanitarian actors operating in Gaza while based in Deir Al Balah;
- The ETC field coordinator departed Gaza on 27 May for a one-week rest and recuperation (R&R). The field coordinator has been deployed in Gaza since 22 April to strengthen face-to-face engagements and support partners with technical advice and guidance;
- The ETC ICT Specialist is in Jerusalem since 06 May seeking to renew his Israeli visa and carrying out ETC activities from there;
- A Global ETC Information Management Officer (IMO) has been remotely supporting the operation from Dubai, UAE, since 22 April while the recruitment and onboarding of a dedicated local IMO was ongoing. A candidate has now been selected and is scheduled to commence duties on 02 June, while based in Cairo.

### Funding

- On 13 May 2024, the ETC received US\$415,000 from the Government of Poland to set

up common ICT services. A further US\$158,228 from the US Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) was received on 21 May 2024 to support the maritime logistics project with communications services.

- Therefore, the total funding status of the ETC is now 31.8% of the US\$1.8 million requested in the revised Flash Appeal to undertake activities and address the immediate communication needs in Gaza. The revised Flash Appeal, incorporating ETC's budget requirement of US\$1.8 million, was published by OCHA on 17 April.

### Challenges

- **Limited Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) and Internet Service Providers (ISP) services:** Due to the prevailing escalated hostilities and increase restrictions of movement for commodities, the local MNOs and ISPs are experiencing network outages from damaged infrastructure, lack of fuel, and insecure conditions to carry out repairs. The current conditions make it difficult to maintain the remaining functional network and have resulted in loss of connectivity in Rafah.
- **Lack of telecommunications equipment:** The availability of telecommunications equipment on the ground is severely restricted and much has been damaged or destroyed. Further, the importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is restricted and prolonged. Only 20 satellite phones, four VHF repeaters, four solar power solutions, and 30 VHF handheld radios have been approved for import into Gaza by the Israeli authorities since 07 October 2023. This is severely limiting the delivery of ETC services.
- **Safety of staff:** The safety of humanitarian aid workers in Gaza is a primary concern and priority. The deployment of shared ETC communications services and face-to-face technical support to other humanitarian responders remains a challenge due to insecurity. Due to the situation, most UN staff had to relocate from Rafah to Deir Al Balah and a staff ceiling is in place, constraining the ability to deliver.
- **Movement of staff:** There is currently a restriction of movement in and out of Gaza since 07 May across all border crossing points, thereby delaying staff rotation, and affecting implementation of humanitarian activities. The only route to enter Gaza at the moment is through Amman, Jordan, to Israel and then through the border crossing at Kerem Shalom.
- **Funding:** Lack of full funding has limited the ETC in addressing the immediate life-saving communications needs for humanitarian responders in Gaza. The total funding status is currently 31.8% of the US\$1.8 million requested in the revised Flash Appeal to undertake its activities and address the immediate communication needs in Gaza.
- **Cybersecurity:** 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.

## 3. Partner Updates

### International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

- Thuraya satellite phone services were reportedly disrupted following the failure of one out of the two Yhasat satellites in April. The current service is partially degraded, and the company is working on restoring the services.
- The ICRC is currently using their dedicated analogue VHF radio communication system in Gaza. The status on the number of channels, licensing agreements, and allocated frequency will be confirmed to inform the ETC if there is a possibility of sharing the ICRC communications platform with other humanitarian International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs).

#### 4. AOB

- N/a

**The next teleconference will be held on Tuesday 11 June at 13:00 UTC.**

13:00 UTC  
15:00 Rome  
16:00 Cairo/Jerusalem  
17:00 Dubai

## Acronyms

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
COGAT	Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories
ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
FM	Frequency Modulation
HI	Humanity and Inclusion
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IMO	Information Management Officer
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ISP	Internet Service Provider
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
JHOC	Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre
MNO	Mobile Network Operator
MTIT	Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications & Information Technology
SCS	Security Communications Systems
SMT	Security Management Team
TDH	Terre des hommes Lausanne
TRA	Telecommunications Regulatory Authority
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
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

VHF	Very High Frequency
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

**Minutes:** Mufaro Masuka, ETC Palestine Information Management Officer.