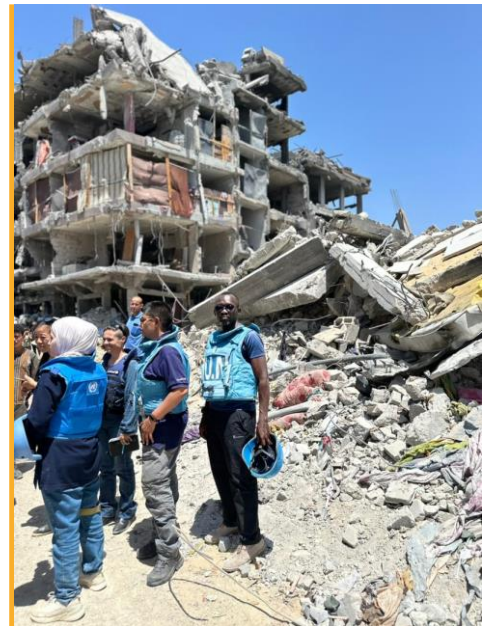# Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #34
Reporting period: 19/06/2024 to 25/06/2024

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated for the conflict crisis in Gaza on 31 October 2023. Situation Reports are published weekly.

Highlights

- On 24 June, the ETC received approval from the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) to import 25 Track24, a satellite-based staff movement tracking device, intended for use by WFP, Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS), and Gaza operations. The ETC team reached out to the heads of UN agencies asking them to confirm their interest by 24 June to consolidate the procurement list.

- On 20 June, the ETC team and OCHA staff conducted an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) assessment at the planned Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC) which will be located at the Japanese Health Centre in Khan Yunis. The ETC—along with the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) staff—has scheduled a follow-up assessment on 25 June to identify additional ICT equipment and alternate power supply needs required at the site.

ICCG conducts a joint assessment to identify suitable locations for expanding humanitarian response in Jabalia. Photo: ICCG/UNICEF

- On 19 June, the ETC team participated in the joint assessment conducted by the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) in Jabalia. The ETC focused on identifying the telecommunications and connectivity services situation. Mobile Network Operator (MNO)—Jawwal—is the only available network in Jabalia, requiring multiple attempts to establish a call. The ETC intends to coordinate with Jawwal to strengthen Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) communications services in the area.

Situation overview

The security situation in Gaza remains volatile due to the continuing hostilities. Israeli bombardment from the air, land, and sea as well as ground incursions and heavy fighting continue to be reported across much of the Gaza Strip, resulting in further civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction of houses and other civilian infrastructure.

Since 06 May, intensified hostilities following the issuance of evacuation orders and the ground incursion by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in Rafah has displaced about one million people amid a decline in the entry of humanitarian aid, further crippling the humanitarian operations. Assessments by humanitarian organizations over the past month have highlighted the dire conditions facing displaced families, with significant challenges to their ability to access basic services. The situation has also

compelled most of the humanitarian actors to relocate to Deir Al Balah, resulting in most of the humanitarian offices in Rafah being non-operational.

Telecommunications Overview

Voice services provided by MNOs—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational at limited capacity due to limited fuel and a congested network due to very few operational telecommunications towers. However, Ooredoo services are completely unavailable in Jabalia. Both MNOs do not offer internet connectivity, as was the condition before the onset of hostilities in October 2023.

Internet connectivity remains a primary communications challenge across the Gaza Strip and is worsening as displaced people relocate from Rafah to other locations in the North. Internet Service Provider (ISP)—Paltel—continues to provide internet services in parts of Rafah, Deir Al Balah, Jabalia, and Gaza City, though with intermittent connectivity.

With to the prevailing escalated hostilities, the local MNOs and ISPs are experiencing network outages due to damaged infrastructure, limited access to fuel, and insecure conditions for carrying out repairs. These conditions make it difficult to maintain the remaining functional network. The sporadic access to connectivity has severely disrupted humanitarian aid operations and communication with the humanitarian responders on the ground.

Iridium and Thuraya satellite phone voice services are operational across the Gaza Strip.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC coordinator is based in Deir Al Balah to boost coordination activities on the ground and support humanitarian actors operating in Gaza with their technical needs, guidance, and advice, given the limited availability of telecommunications services in Gaza.

On 19 June, the ETC team participated in the joint assessment conducted by the ICCG in Jabalia. The ETC focused on identifying the telecommunications and connectivity services situation. The MNO—Jawwal—is the only available network in Jabalia, and multiple attempts are required to establish a call. The ETC intends to coordinate with Jawwal to strengthen GSM communications services in the area.

On 20 June, the ETC met with OCHA to expedite the COGAT approvals for pending ICT equipment and to seek support on logistical arrangements for the transportation of four solar-powered solutions into Gaza, which are currently in Jerusalem.

The ETC is engaging with key humanitarian leads to strengthen advocacy efforts concerning the challenges which humanitarian agencies and partners face in importing ICT and telecommunications equipment into Gaza to establish common communications services.

The ETC is participating in the community engagement discussions led by OCHA to identify an effective Community Feedback Mechanism (CFM) to address the issues related to the ongoing internal displacement of people.

During the reporting period, the ETC submitted four lists with a total of 16 ICT equipment items to COGAT for approval to import into Gaza, including Track24 which is a satellite-based staff movement tracking device.

Internet connectivity

The reduced capacity of internet services and the recurrent connectivity disruptions across Gaza continues to severely affect life-saving humanitarian aid access, especially in Deir Al Balah where most of the humanitarian responders are now based. The local ISP faces multiple challenges, including reduced staff, lack of spare parts, and safe access to repair and maintain the remaining network services.

To address the urgent need for connectivity services, the ETC is engaging with the local ISP to prioritize strengthening internet connectivity services in Deir Al Balah. The ETC is liaising with agencies and partners for technical advice and assessments and is coordinating with the ISP to establish connectivity services at their new offices and guesthouses in Deir Al Balah following the relocation from Rafah.

On 20 June, the ETC team and OCHA staff conducted an ICT assessment at the planned JHOC, which will be located at the Japanese Health Centre in Khan Yunis. The local ISP—Paltel—is scheduled to install a high-speed 200 Mbps (Megabits per second) internet connectivity at this site. The ETC, along with OCHA and UNRWA staff, has scheduled a follow-up assessment on 25 June to identify additional ICT equipment and alternate power supply needs required at the site.

On 20 June, the ETC supported the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization Network (PNGO) with an ICT assessment mainly focused on internet connectivity. The ETC provided guidance and advice on procuring additional locally available ICT equipment which can enhance Wi-Fi coverage on the PNGO premises. The ETC plans to schedule another assessment after the devices has been procured and installed.

The ETC contacted its global partners—the Government of Luxembourg and Ericsson Response—to mobilize the emergency internet deployment kit (referred to as the ETC Rapid Response Solution) in response to the high demand for reliable internet services in Gaza. The ETC is engaging with its partners to initiate the prerequisites of customs clearance upon arrival in Jerusalem and securing approval from COGAT for importation into Gaza.

Security communications

The ETC has initiated the approval request to COGAT to import approximately 50 VHF radios located in Jerusalem which belong to different UN agencies and is coordinating with OCHA to secure approval to transport these radios into Gaza. These 50 radios are in addition to the 30 pre-approved VHF digital radios that were transported into Gaza on 16 June, facilitated by OCHA after the import clearance from COGAT was received. The ETC team is coordinating to hand over the radios to WFP, UNDSS, and other agencies operating in Gaza.

On 24 June, the ETC received approval from COGAT to import 25 Track24 devices into Gaza, intended for use by WFP, JLOTS, and Gaza operations. The team is now following up with the WFP protocol unit and the vendor in Jerusalem to initiate the dispatch of the first batch of devices to Jerusalem. The purchase also includes the Track24 software which will be made available to UNDSS in Gaza and Jerusalem Security Operations Centres (SOCs), to monitor any vehicle equipped with the Track24 devices.

On 22 June, WFP offered to facilitate the procurement of Track24 solutions to other UN agencies. The ETC team reached out to the heads of UN agencies asking them to confirm their interest by 24 June to consolidate the procurement list. So far, nine UN agencies have showed their interest for a total of 66 devices. The cost will be advanced by WFP to speed up the procurement process and recovered from requesting agencies based on the final invoice. The procurement of the solution includes the hardware, as well as the activation and subscription cost for 12 months of service. The ETC team is preparing the application for these extra devices to COGAT for approval to import and transport them to Gaza in coordination with OCHA.

On 23 June, the ETC participated in the conclusion of the Security Risk Management (SRM) exercise to identify the security communications needs for the UN operations in Gaza. The recommendations and inputs to the SRM are being reviewed by the Security Cell, which is led by UNDSS.

The SOC in Gaza has been operational 24/7 at a limited capacity, equipped with basic tools and three dedicated SOC operators. The ETC is engaging with local vendors in Jerusalem and supporting UNDSS in procuring ICT equipment for the SOCs in Gaza and Jerusalem to be fully operational. The Jerusalem SOC will be outfitted with essential satellite-based communications devices to monitor real-time locations of staff during field missions in Gaza, serving as a backup. Meanwhile, the Gaza SOC will be equipped with all the standard communication tools to ensure staff safety inside Gaza.

Staffing

There are currently three dedicated ETC staff engaged in the response:

- The ETC coordinator is based in Deir Al Balah and has been in Gaza since 24 May to boost ETC presence on the ground and coordinate and support humanitarian actors operating in Gaza.

- The ETC field coordinator arrived in Deir Al Balah on 06 June to resume duties, strengthen face-to-face engagements, and support partners with technical advice and guidance.

- A dedicated ETC Information Management Officer (IMO) is based in Cairo since 02 June to support the response.

Dashboard

See the **ETC Dashboard** for an overview of planned and operational services.

Infographic

See the **ETC Infographic** for an overview of activities data, information, and location of planned and operational services.

Factsheet

See the **ETC Factsheet** for further information and funding requirements.

Funding

The ETC requires a total of US$1.8 million requested in the revised occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) Flash Appeal to address urgent and critical lifesaving efforts in Gaza until 31 December 2024.

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.

Currently, the ETC is 31.8% funded out of the US$1.8 million requested in the revised Flash Appeal to undertake cluster activities and address the immediate communications needs in Gaza.

Challenges

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.

Movement of staff: Since 07 May, staff movement in and out of Gaza has been restricted across all border crossing points, delaying staff rotation, and affecting humanitarian activities.

Limited telecommunications services: Due to the prevailing escalated hostilities, the local MNOs and ISPs are experiencing network outages due to damaged infrastructure, limited access to fuel, and insecure conditions to carry out repairs. The current conditions make it difficult to maintain the remaining functional network.

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, 25 Track24 devices, 30 digital VHF radios, four VHF repeaters and four solar power solutions have been approved for importation into Gaza by COGAT since 07 October 2023.

Internet connectivity: Lack of internet connectivity in Deir Al Balah is hampering the reactivation of the SCS network. The SCS network is unavailable across the rest of Gaza due to damaged equipment and restrictions on SCS equipment importation.

Funding: Insufficient funding has limited the ETC in addressing the immediate life-saving communications needs for humanitarian responders in Gaza. The ETC continues to appeal for funding from varied potential donors.

Cybersecurity continues to be a pressing issue. Caution should be applied when using technology platforms, including social media and press platforms.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Teleconference with partners on the response in Gaza will be held on **Tuesday 25 June 2024 at 11:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on 11 June 2024. All minutes are uploaded **here**.

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

www.etcluster.org/emergency/palestine-conflict

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