ETC Situation Report #02

Syria Crisis

Reporting period 28/12/2012 to 30/01/2013

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Summary:

- The situation in Syria remains extremely volatile and subject to rapid change.
- An IASC System-Wide Emergency was activated on 15/01/13. Humanitarian organizations such as UNICEF and UNHCR are scaling up operations in response and it is expected that additional clusters will be activated.
- Staff numbers have been significantly reduced within Syria for security reasons and some UN agencies are operating from backup offices.
- The ETC is attempting to provide common telecommunications services within Syria, however lack of access and restrictions on movement have complicated these efforts.

Cluster Responsibilities:

- WFP, as ETC local lead, is providing emergency telecommunications support to humanitarian organizations on the ground including VHF/HF radio programming and installation.
- Responsibility for the provision of ETC services across the common operational areas in the region has been split between WFP and UNHCR.
    - WFP is providing common telecommunications services to the humanitarian community in Syria, Turkey and Iraq.
    - UNHCR is providing common telecommunications services to the humanitarian community in Lebanon and Jordan.
    - WFP is providing support to UNHCR telecommunications service provision if and when required.
    - WFP coordinates regional activities in close collaboration with UNHCR.

Achievements:

- The ETC is coordinating operations from Damascus and Amman and ETC Working Groups in both locations are meeting regularly.
- UNDSS restrictions on UN missions to the field have been lifted. Two missions took place to Homs and Tartus to help set up ICT capacity for the WFP offices there.

- A shipment of 10 BGANs recently arrived in Beirut. These will be used to provide backup connectivity to WFP field offices in Syria once Syrian authorities have approved their entry into the country.
- The ETC has been installing and programming VHF/HF radios for the humanitarian community in Damascus.
- The ETC is supporting UNDSS with technical advice on vehicle tracking systems.
- WFP as ETC local lead, has been designated the main focal point for liaising with the Syrian authorities regarding importation and licensing issues on behalf of other UN agencies.
- Additional ETC staff are ready to be deployed to support common operational areas once approval is granted.
- Radio programming and installation support has already been provided to OCHA and WHO from the WFP backup office.

Challenges and Gaps:

- Lack of access remains the biggest challenge for the ETC in Syria and affects the entire operation. Movement inside Syria is severely restricted. The only movement currently taking place is between Damascus and Beirut.
- Licensing and importing equipment into Syria is a huge challenge. The Syrian authorities have approved the importation of some radio equipment, however VSAT and BGANs are still not permitted.
- There is a lack of VSAT terminals in field offices and no backup connectivity.
- There is limited VHF coverage in Damascus and a lack of operational repeaters in the field i.e. Aleppo, Tartus, Qamishli and Homs.
    o In addition, DSL and 3G internet services are working, but there is minimal coverage in remote areas.
    o Repeater coverage also needs to be improved in Lebanon.
- The radio room in Damascus is no longer operational due to staff reductions.
- Damascus is currently experiencing frequent blackouts, as there is no fuel for the generators. These can significantly impede operations as they leave staff without access to the internet.
- There are very few wireless bridges. This means that offices belonging to humanitarian organizations cannot be linked to each other or to their respective warehouses.

Planned Activities:

- The ETC is planning to increase capacity in Damascus with the deployment of an additional staff member.
- The ETC is prepositioning equipment that will be used to provide data connectivity to the humanitarian community on the ground. Equipment will be deployed to Syria once authorized.
- The humanitarian community is discussing the possibility of extending operations to five additional locations within Syria, however lack of access makes this difficult and it has not yet been confirmed.
- There are tentative plans to deliver Let's Comm training to humanitarian staff on the ground.

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Meetings:

The next Global ETC teleconference on Syria will be held on Thursday 31 January 2013 at:

    0900 New York
    1400 UTC
    1500 Rome/Geneva
    1600 Damascus
    1700 Amman
    1800 Dubai

Regular updates will continue to be shared through SitReps available on the ICT Humanitarian Emergency Platform (HEP) website.

The last ETC Working Group meetings were held on 23 January in Damascus and on 26 January in Amman. Minutes are available on the HEP website. The next ETC Working Group meeting in Amman will be held on 3 February. The next ETC Working Group meeting in Damascus will be held on 25 February.

ICT Humanitarian Emergency Platform (HEP) links:

All information related to the ETC response in Syria can be found on the ICT Humanitarian Emergency Platform (HEP):

Syria page: http://ictemergency.wfp.org/web/ictepr/countries/syria

Syria ETC e-mail address: Syria.ETC@wfp.org

Staff in the Operation:

[Indicate the status of all staff involved in the operation, WFP and non WFP staff.]

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Status Matrix:

[Provide an overview of the situation in each location of the operation. If needed, add or delete columns.]

LOCATION	AGENCY	REPEATER	DATA	VOICE	RADIO ROOM	ICT SUPPORT STAFF	SHARED SERVICES
Damascus	DSS	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Radio Room
	WFP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	VHF repeater only
	UNDP	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Helpdesk to UNDSS
	UNCIF	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
	WHO	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes IT	No
	UNFPA	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Generator with OCHA
	OCHA	No			No	Yes	Generator with UNFPA
	UNHCR	Yes, one installed and licensed One not installed and not licensed	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
	FAO	No	Yes		No	Yes	No
	UNRWA	No, one in stock but not licensed	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

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Acronyms:

BGAN	Broadband Global Area Network
ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
HEP	ICT Humanitarian Emergency Platform
HF	High Frequency
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SMT	Security Management Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
VHF	Very High Frequency
VPN	Virtual Private Network
VSAT	Very Small Aperture Terminal (Satellite ground station)
WFP	UN World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization