

Palestine, conflict

Global ETC Teleconference #11

Date: 10/01/2024 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:

Palestine.ETC@wfp.org

Attendance

Chair (ETC)

Access Now

Cadus
ETC Global

ETC Palestine

FAO
Government of Luxembourg
ICRC
International Rescue Committee

IOM
ITU
Meedan
REACH Impactive Initiatives
Save the Children

Search for Common Ground
UNDSS
UNHCR
UNICEF

Brent Carbno

Ben Grazda
Giulio Coppi
Marwa Fatafta
Corinna Schaefer
Caroline Teyssier
Maria Saleh
Marie Elena Bock
Mufaro Masuka
Burak Sezgin
Hossam Metwally
Komi Amedjonekou
Ayman Barakat
Roland Nurenberg
Claudiu Mateescu
Alan Mooney
Moayyad Fares
Newton Muli
Adel Darwish
Aaron Huslage
Raphael Bacot
Lour Kuttub
Mark Hawkins
Rami Assali
Mohammad Alawi
Andrew Sentamu
Jalal Tamimi
Kamal Kamaledine
Marta Dabbas
Marc Dieng
Nasri Sidawi

UNRWA
UN Women
US State Department
WFP

Lukasz Cyra
Nabeel Al-Ghara
Joseph Burton
Aramais Alojants
Burak Sezgin
Dane Novarlic
David Pickering
Lionel Marre
Mostafa Ghaly
Ozdzan Hadziemin
Sami Alio
Waleed Salah
Mohammed Elsheikh
Akil Hassan

WHO

Agenda

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

Minutes

1. Situation update

- Heavy bombardments from air, land, and sea, and intense ground operations between Israeli forces and Hamas armed groups continued across most of the Gaza Strip, with deadly incidences reported in varied locations between 05 and 07 January. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 1.9 million people—approximately 90% of the Gaza population—are internally displaced and 60% of the infrastructure has been destroyed or damaged.
- On 06 January, an evacuation order was announced for neighbourhoods in Khan Younis, including Al Batan As Samin, Kizan Abu Radwan, Jorat Al Laut, Al Manara, Kizan An Najar, Almesakar, and Al Lkarin.
- On 08 January, humanitarian agencies reported the rejection of authorization for coordinated movement requests, thereby critically inhibiting time-sensitive response for items such as medicine, fuel, water, and sanitation.
- The frequent disruption in telecommunications and network congestion when available, along with intensified hostilities, insecurity, blocked roads, and scarcity of fuel pose significant challenges to humanitarian operations in Gaza.
- Some humanitarian agencies are relying on their independent connectivity platforms or the local infrastructure—when available—for access to telecommunications services. It remains a priority for humanitarian responders to obtain authorization to set up

independent and reliable shared services for telecommunications to ensure coordinated humanitarian service delivery to the population of Gaza.

- Electricity to charge devices is limited in certain areas that have generators and solar power solutions. Other locations are completely without power since the shutdown of Gaza's sole power plant by Israeli authorities on 11 October.

2. Global ETC update

Coordination/equipment

- The ETC Coordinator—Komi Amedjonekou—arrived in Cairo, Egypt, on 09 January to support coordination activities until issuance of entry documents to deploy and be based in Jerusalem.
- The ETC ICT Specialist—Burak Sezgin—arrived in Rafah, Gaza, on 08 January and immediately embarked on a technical engagement with local actors to establish the current telecommunications status, plan for a comprehensive ICT needs assessment, and set up technical coordination processes for the response. Burak is also available to undertake ICT technical support for the humanitarian responders in need for the next three weeks, while in Gaza.
- On 03 January, the ETC attended the online national ICT Working Group (WG) for the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) to introduce the ETC Coordinator and presented updates on the ETC activities and progress for the Gaza operation. A major discussion point was the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) devices for location sharing and movement tracking inside the Gaza Strip. The GPS devices are confirmed to be very accurate and efficient compared to the use of SIM card-based mobile telephone devices. The ETC is exploring information on the authorized importation process of the GPS devices into Gaza from either Egypt or the United Arab Emirates (UAE), for use by humanitarian responders to safely undertake their mandate.
- On 05 January, the ETC participated in the national Interagency Coordination Cell Group (ICCG) meeting for the OPT. Discussions on the challenges with telecommunications equipment importation and Israeli entry visa issuance for staff to deploy to Gaza were the major highlights.
- On 04 January, the ETC met with Access Now, a non-profit US-based organization that aims at defending and extending the digital rights of people and communities at risk. The meeting discussed the challenges the ETC is experiencing including the equipment importation into Gaza, personnel visas to enter Gaza, and current feedback received from the local authorities. Access Now proposed to convey ETC's messages and challenges to their contacts at the US Department of State (also a Global ETC partner) and the US National Security Council to advocate for the ETC.
- On 09 January, the ETC met with the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) for an update on the authorization to import telecommunications equipment and set up an independent and reliable communications platform for humanitarian responders. COGAT requested the full justification for importing the equipment and enquired whether all telecommunications systems intended for use in

Gaza can be hand carried, used on local service provider platforms, and disabled remotely. The ETC and partners submitted all the requested information to COGAT during the meeting. The ETC is further writing an official letter to COGAT stating the full justification of importing the telecommunications equipment and will submit it before 12 January.

- The ETC met First Responders Radio Station representatives on 07 January to discuss the setting up of an FM radio station broadcasting solution for the population in Gaza. The ETC is ready to technically assist First Responders Radio Station with reactivation of the FM radio broadcasting service once they successfully import the equipment with full authorization from COGAT.
- The ETC is supporting global partner—International Telecommunication Union (ITU)—to allocate 100 fully activated Thuraya satellite phones to UN agencies operating in the Gaza emergency response—for enhanced communication services. The satellite phones were donated by the Government of the UAE to ITU for the inter-agency use 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. The ETC invited all UN agencies working in Gaza to submit expressions of interest, stating quantity of phones needed and justification by participating in an online survey, running from 26 December to 04 January. Eight UN agencies have expressed their interest in getting an allocation of the Thuraya satellite phones once they are authorized for importation into Gaza.

Mobile communications/telephony

- Palestinian Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo services—are available in Rafah but only offering voice calls, which are mostly congested, resulting in calls being queued up for an average waiting time of two minutes to connect.
- Mobile phone data connectivity is available in Rafah from Israeli service provider, Cellcom, and a 1-kilometre radius spillover from the border of Egyptian MNO, Vodafone.
- e-SIMs are also operational in the whole of Gaza where Cellcom connectivity is available.

Data connectivity

- The Rafah Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC), which houses all humanitarian agencies, has optical-fibre and microwave link data connectivity from local service provider—Al Zahal—who in turn are connected to Israeli service provider, Bezeq. Rapid tests and observations by the ETC ICT Specialist indicate stability and efficient connectivity.
- Rafah town also has data connectivity from the Palestine telecommunications company, Paltel.

ICT Helpdesk

- The World Health Organization (WHO) Medicin San Frontiers (MSF), World Central Kitchen (WCK), and United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) have requested technical support from the ETC ICT Specialist in Gaza to resolve some network challenges they are facing.
- The ETC ICT Specialist is gathering the names and ICT support needs of other humanitarian agencies currently operating in Gaza.

- The ETC ICT Specialist’s movement to other locations is currently restricted due to the security situation. On 11 January, the specialist is planning to visit shopping centres in the JHOC neighbourhood to explore and understand the data connectivity platforms being used.

Security Communication Systems (SCS)

- The ETC is collaborating with the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) to visit the Rafah VHF radio repeater site to ascertain the operational status. UNDSS colleagues identified power as the primary challenge at the Rafah repeater site in December 2023. An independent power solution such as a solar system is needed for this site. The ETC ICT Specialist will assess the repeater to identify the full challenges that need to be rectified.
- The ETC is also read to technically assist UNDSS with the programming of VHF/HF handheld radios for use on the SCS in Gaza once authorization is issued by COGAT.

Staffing

- The ETC Coordinator—Komi Amedjonekou—arrived in Cairo, Egypt, on 09 January and joined the ETC Deputy Coordinator—Hossam Metwally—to remotely support all Gaza response activities. Both members of staff await the issuance of entry documents to deploy and be based in Jerusalem.
- The ETC Senior ICT Specialist—Burak Sezgin—arrived in Rafah, Gaza, on 08 January for an initial technical engagement with local actors to plan initial ICT needs assessment and to set up technical coordination processes for the response.
- Mufaro Masuka—ETC Information Management Officer—continues to remotely support the response until entry visa, travel documents, and contract are finalized for the identified replacement candidate. The WFP Standby Partnership unit is currently identifying the replacement candidate from the submitted profiles.

3. Partner Updates

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

- ITU is exploring funding from potential donors to enable possible purchase and activation of satellite phone devices in Israel from authorized service providers, for immediate use by humanitarian responders in Gaza.

4. AOB

- N/a

The next teleconference will be held on Wednesday 17 January at 13:00 UTC.

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

Acronyms

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
ACF	Action Against Hunger / Action contre la Faim
CD	Country Director
COGAT	Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GPS	Global Positioning System
HF	High Frequency
ICCG	Interagency Coordination Cell Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MNO	Mobile Network Operator
OPT	Occupied Palestine Territories
SCS	Security Communication Systems
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
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
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VHF	Very High Frequency
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Minutes: Mufaro Masuka, Information Management Officer.