Palestine, conflict

Global ETC Teleconference #16
Date: 06/03/2024 **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 (41)

Chair (ETC)	**Brent Carbno**
Access Now	Marwa Farafta
Action Against Hunger (ACF)	Maya Papotti
Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)	Rakesh Bharania
Cisco	Eric Knudson
	Matt Altman
Ericsson Response	Lars Ruediger
ETC Global	Mufaro Masuka
	Komi Amedjonekou
	Lena Bock
ETC Palestine	Bipin Jha
	Hossam Metwally
Government of Luxembourg	Alain Lang
ICRC	Claudiu Mateescu
	Rebeca Lucia Galindo
Impact initiatives	Raphael Bacot
International Rescue Committee	Moayyad Fares
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)	Mustafa Ahmed Ali Al Mahdi
	Doris Maritza Delago
Medical Aid for Palestinians	Sam Wahlstrom
MSF	Aurelie Niox-Chateau
NetHope	Anja Delaquis
Office of the Quartet (Palestine)	Enas Abu Laban
Save the Children	Lour Kuttab
Search for Common Ground	Rami Assali
Terre des Hommes (TDH)	Pantelis Kouvaris
UNICEF	Bilal Tamimi
	Marta Dabbas
	Marc Dieng
UNESCO	Aslam Badran
	Jackson Krainer

UNMAS	Mufleh Talouzi
UNOPS	Mikkel Brodersen
UNRWA	Rita Okechukwu
	Darwish Al-Helo
UNSCO	Dalibor Marinic
UN Women	Hisham Obaid
US Department of State	Joseph K Burton
WFP	Angel Buitrago
	Sami Alio
WHO	Akil Hassan

Agenda

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

Minutes

1. Situation update

- Intense Israeli bombardment from air, land, and sea continues to be reported across much of the Gaza Strip, resulting in further civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction of civilian infrastructure. Thousands of Palestinians continue to flee further south towards Rafah, which is now severely overcrowded. Population movements out of Rafah and towards Deir Al Balah and Nuseirat refugee camps in the Middle Area have been reported.

- The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reports that 1.7 million people (over 75% of the population) have been displaced across Gaza Strip, some multiple times.

- 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.

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- 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.

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.

- The ETC is in continuous engagement with the Office of the Quartet for an update on the anticipated importation of the materials by MNOs required for the repairs and maintenance for continuation of telecommunications services in Gaza. According to the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology (MTIT), on 05 March MNOs Jawwal, Ooredoo and Paltel has secured approval from the Israeli Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) to import essential spare parts—primarily cables—to undertake critical repair and maintenance activities.

- The ETC is collaborating with UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) in Jerusalem to coordinate the arrival, configuration, assignment of call signs, and the distribution of the approved 30 Security Communications Systems (SCS) Very High Frequency (VHF) digital radios. The ETC donated 30 SCS digital VHF radios to the UNDSS is being imported from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and destined for use by UN agencies providing humanitarian support in Gaza.

- On 06 March, the ETC conducted a survey amongst the operational UN agencies in Gaza to collect their SCS needs, focal point contact details, and desired quantities to facilitate the distribution of the approved 30 digital VHF radios upon importation into Gaza. The survey submission deadline is set for 14 March and the results will be shared with UNDSS for effective distribution of digital VHF handheld radios.

Data connectivity services

- The data connectivity services from MNOs Jawwal and Ooredoo are limited with intermittent connectivity across Gaza. Paltel ISP has restored internet services in parts of Rafah, though characterized by intermittent connectivity.

Telephony

- On 25 February, the ETC conducted two communications assessments in Deir al Balah as part of the preparedness efforts for the possible humanitarian response expansion to cater for the population returning towards the north. The assessment results showed the availability of 3G signals with limited or no data connectivity. The ETC is collaborating with OCHA in seeking the COGAT approval of solutions to strengthen the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) signals of MNOs around Deir al Balah.

- Voice services provided by MNOs Jawwal and Ooredoo are operational, although the network is congested due to increased subscribers in Rafah following multiple displacements and few operational telecommunications towers due to fuel allocation limitations.

- The ETC is anticipating clarification from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) regarding the distribution of 100 Thuraya Satellite phones donated by the Government of the UAE, specifically inquiring whether they can also be allocated to I/NGOs or if it must be solely to UN agencies in Gaza. A survey was conducted in January for UN agencies to express their interest, required quantity of satellite phones, and focal point contact details.

Security communications services

- On 26 February, WFP FITTEST[1] in the UAE pre-configured 10 armoured vehicles (AVs) with analogue and simplex channels to facilitate communication with each other during convoy travel missions in Gaza. In coordination with UNDSS, the vehicles will be shipped from the UAE to El Arish Airport and eventually imported into Gaza for further distribution to UN agencies operating in Gaza. There is an urgent need for additional AVs in Gaza to ensure safe delivery of humanitarian assistance.

- On 25 February, the ETC addressed power supply issue at the UNDSS-managed SCS VHF digital radio repeater site in Al Shaboura Clinic in Rafah. The ETC successfully installed and commissioned a solar power solution ensuring continuous 24/7 operation of the VHF radio repeater, overcoming previous limitations with a generator operating only five days a week from 0730 until 1600.

Staffing

- There are four dedicated ETC staff deployed in the response. The ETC Coordinator who was based in Rafah, Gaza, since 31 January, is currently on annual leave, out of the country. The Deputy ETC Coordinator is currently leading all coordination related activities remotely from Cairo. An ETC Telecommunications Specialist is scheduled to join the operation in mid-March and possibly deploy to Gaza to assist partners with technical support 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 USD 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 2023. Submissions have been made to the revised Flash Appeal by Clusters to reflect their updated requirements extended until 31 December 2024. The updated ETC budget requirement of USD 1.8 million for extended period is being drafted for submission to OCHA by 16 March 2024.

Challenges

- ETC operations in Gaza are severely restricted by the intensity of hostilities which are spreading further south and have reached the outskirts of northern Rafah, where the humanitarian community (including the ETC) is based. Access to some locations for communication assessments and coordination is extremely challenging, and fuel to power telecommunications infrastructure remains scarce.

3. Partner Updates

Office of the Quartet

- The Office of the Quartet highlighted the current repair efforts for the basic resumption of the telecommunications services in Gaza. Three telecommunications operators—

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[1] Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team

Jawwal, Ooredoo and Paltel—have submitted the list of materials needed for the repairs. However, the COGAT has only approved the procurement of cables for repairs.

- The Office of the Quartet highlighted the need to advocate for the set-up of backup data centres to be established in West Bank, as highlighted by the MTIT, following the cases of loss/destruction of health data.

- Additionally, suggestions were made for advocacy to establish stable internet connectivity to resume online education for the students in Gaza, connecting with the University in West Bank, and establishing IT hubs to facilitate cash-for-work programs in Gaza.

4. AOB

- The risk of cyber threats in the Palestine-Gaza operation is critically high.

The next teleconference will be held on Wednesday 20 March at 13:00 UTC.

13:00 UTC
14:00 Rome
15:00 Cairo/Jerusalem
17:00 Dubai

Acronyms

ACF	Action Against Hunger / Action Contre la Faim
COGAT	Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories
ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FITTEST	Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team
GSM	Global System for Mobile Communications
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
ICCG	Inter-agency Coordination Cell Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISP	Internet Service Provider
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MNO	Mobile Network Operator
OPT	Occupied Palestine Territory
SBP	Standby Partnership
SCS	Security Communications 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
VHF	Very High Frequency
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Minutes: Bipin Jha, ETC Palestine Information Management Officer.