

Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #11

Reporting period: 03/01/2024 to 10/01/2024

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

Highlights

- As stated by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator on 05 January, “the humanitarian community has been left with the impossible mission of supporting more than two million people, even as its own staff are being killed and displaced, as communication blackouts continue, as roads are damaged and convoys are shot at, and as commercial supplies vital to survival are almost non-existent.”
- The ETC Information Communication Technology (ICT) Specialist 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.
- On 03 January, the ETC presented the challenges faced by the cluster to the new UN Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and the WFP Palestine Country Director (CD) of providing secure, independent, and reliable communications for humanitarians in Gaza.



Buildings, telecommunications, and power infrastructure have been destroyed in Gaza due to the ongoing conflict. Photo: UNRWA

Situation overview

On 09 January, 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 07 and 08 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.

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blackouts continue, as roads are damaged and convoys are shot at, and as commercial supplies vital to survival are almost non-existent.”

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.

From 08 to 10 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.

Telecommunications overview

The frequent disruption in telecommunications, 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.

ETC Activities

Coordination

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.

On 02 January, the ETC presented the challenges faced by the cluster to the new UN HC and the WFP Palestine CD of providing secure, independent, and reliable communications for humanitarians in Gaza.

On 03 January, the ETC attended the national ICT Working Group (WG) for the Occupied Palestine Territories (OPT) to introduce the ETC Coordinator and present updates on the ETC activities and progress for the Gaza operation.

On 05 January, the ETC participated in the national Interagency Coordination Cell Group (ICCG) meeting for the OPT, where the major discussion point was the use of stand-alone 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 engaging the WFP Regional Bureau for the Middle East and Northern Africa (RBC) to ascertain availability of the GPS devices in their current ICT stocks, for possible deployment to Gaza. The ETC is exploring information on the authorized importation process of GPS devices into Gaza from either Egypt or the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

On 06 January, the ETC remotely supported the WFP Logistics Cluster to troubleshoot and activate an Iridium satellite phone which was experiencing poor signal connectivity in Gaza.

Equipment importation

The ETC met the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) on 09 January to follow up on progress regarding the revised interagency consolidated ICT equipment needs list resubmitted to COGAT on 07 January. The list is an updated version of the list originally submitted on 04 December. The document contains a detailed description of all equipment, quantities, and solutions required for humanitarians to effectively operate in Gaza. The ETC will continue advocating for the importation of all essential telecommunications equipment to set up a reliable, secure, and independent communication system.

The ETC collaborated with WFP RBC to consolidate a list of IT equipment and budget to enhance the communications needs of the Logistics Cluster and submitted the documents to the WFP Jerusalem CD on 03 January.

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.

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 affected population in Gaza and support access to humanitarian information. The ETC is ready to technically assist First Responders Radio Station with reactivation of the FM radio broadcasting service once they successfully import equipment with full authorization from COGAT.

Data Connectivity

The ETC ICT Specialist 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. On 09 January, the ETC ICT Specialist met key local actors and established the following telecommunications status:

- 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 pockets of data connectivity from the Palestine telecommunications company, Paltel.
- Palestinian Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are available in Rafah offering voice calls, which are often congested, resulting in calls being queued up for an average waiting time of two minutes to connect.

Telephony

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 United Arab Emirates (UAE) to ITU for the inter-agency use and are fully paid for. The ETC conducted an online survey for UN heads of agencies to express their interest in being allocated part of the 100 Thuraya satellite phones. The survey was conducted from 26 December to 04 January and eight UN agencies expressed their interest to be allocated the satellite phone devices. The ETC and ITU are

exploring the possibility of providing extra satellite phone devices to other humanitarian agencies, working in the Gaza response.

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

Security communications systems (SCS)

The ETC is ready to technically assist the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) with the programming of VHF/HF handheld radios for use on the security communications system (SCS) in Gaza once authorization is issued by COGAT.

Currently, the VHF radio network SCS in Gaza has two repeaters—one in each location of Khan Yunis, and Rafah. Both repeaters were functional when the system was reactivated on 03 December. On 13 December, the Khan Yunis repeater site broke down due to a suspected power outage and is currently inaccessible for maintenance work because of the prevailing insecurity. The Rafah repeater is partially operational and connected to a local clinic power system, which relies on a generator running only from 09:00 to 13:00 from Sunday to Thursday. UNDSS has identified power as the primary challenge at the Rafah repeater site. An independent power solution such as a solar system is needed for this site. UNDSS is working to ensure full operational status for the whole SCS and program radios for use.

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 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.

Dashboard

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of planned service locations.

Funding

As of 10 December, the ETC is 64% funded out of the US\$800,000 requested in the Flash Appeal to undertake its activities and address the immediate needs in Gaza. The Government of France and the Government of Luxembourg allocated EUR250,000 each to the ETC response in Gaza in December 2023. The funds will enable the ETC to carry out essential coordination and information management, as well as be ready to deploy shared communications services in up to two locations for two months, pending the evolution of the situation.

The [updated Flash Appeal](#) released on 06 November is requesting US\$1.2 billion to meet the needs of the entire population of Gaza and 500,000 people in the West Bank. It was extended until the end of March 2024.

Challenges

The intensity of hostilities has spread further south to include locations such as Khan Younis and Rafah, thereby limiting the safe movements of humanitarian responders.

Limited access to electricity, fuel, and telecommunications services continues to hamper the humanitarian response in Gaza.

The Rafah Border crossing between Egypt and Gaza is the only point open to deliver humanitarian relief items. The cross-border operations are now extremely restricted due to security checks and the lack of fuel.

Importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is lengthy and extremely challenging.

All items going into Gaza need to be pre-approved by the Israeli authorities. Any items brought in via Egypt also needs to have importation permits from the Egyptian authorities and agreement with the Egyptian Red Crescent, who are the sole consignee of goods for the Rafah Border Crossing.

The reach of operations will remain limited without a prolonged ceasefire, safe access, and significant funding for the humanitarian response.

The risk of cybersecurity issues in this emergency is considered extremely high.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Teleconference with partners on the response in Gaza will be held on **17 January at 13:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on **10 January**. All minutes are uploaded [here](#).

Contacts

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Further information related to the ETC 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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