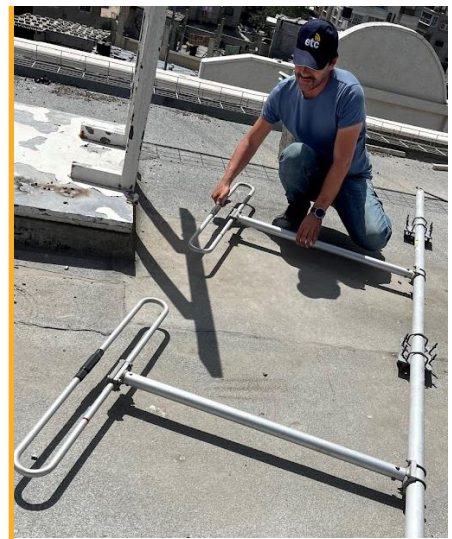# Palestine – Conflict

## ETC Situation Report #27
**Reporting period:** 29/04/2024 to 06/05/2024

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

## Highlights

- With the impending incursion on Rafah, the humanitarian responders in Rafah are planning to move to Deir Al Balah, before heightening of hostilities. The responders are dismantling and packing all humanitarian equipment and other accessories to set up a new Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC) in Deir Al Balah.

- The ETC is leading the dismantling of the complete VHF radio repeater site managed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Al Shaboura Clinic in Rafah for relocation, installation, and use in Deir Al Balah to ensure a reliable and secure communications platform for humanitarian responders there.

- Due to the protracted funding challenges in this operation, the ETC is currently unable to purchase the complete Security Communications System (SCS) kits planned for installation in three sites in Gaza—Deir Al Balah, Gaza City, and Jabalia—to ensure a reliable and secure communications platform for humanitarian responders.



The ETC inspects a VHF radio antenna in Rafah, Gaza. Photo: WFP/ETC

## Situation overview

With the impending incursion on Rafah, the humanitarian responders in Rafah are planning to move to Deir Al Balah, before heightening of hostilities. The responders are dismantling and packing all humanitarian equipment and other accessories to set up a new JHOC in Deir Al Balah. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) is scheduled to inform the United Nations (UN) agencies and other humanitarian responders the exact date of the incursion. In a press encounter on 30 April, UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned of "devastating" and "serious" consequences of a potential military assault on Rafah.

Joint multiple inter-agency assessments are being conducted to identify suitable sites in northern Gaza to accommodate humanitarian responders and be used as aid distribution centres for the affected population.

Israeli bombardment from the air, land, and sea continues to be reported across the Gaza Strip, resulting in further civilian casualties, displacement, destruction of houses and other infrastructure. Airstrikes on Rafah, Deir Al Balah, and Gaza City have reportedly been intense, with continued reports of fighting between the Israeli military and armed Hamas groups in northern Gaza.

The capacity of humanitarian agencies to operate safely and effectively across Gaza remains heavily compromised by recurrent restrictions of access to the north, the lengthy process to import critical equipment, and recurrent intense hostilities.

# Telecommunications Overview

Voice services provided by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational, although the network is congested. Few telecommunications towers are operational due to limited fuel allocation. 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 it is expected to worsen as displaced people relocate from the now volatile security situation in Rafah to their original locations in the North.

Paltel and Ajyal Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are providing internet services in parts of Rafah, Deir Al Balah, Jabalia, and Gaza City, though with intermittent connectivity.

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

# ETC Activities

### Coordination

The ETC, along with other clusters, continue to engage in Area-Based Coordination (ABC) efforts to address connectivity issues, ensure access to information for communities, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid in Khan Yunis and Deir Al Balah. The ABC approach has been adopted following the population movements and the expansion of humanitarian response northwards, resulting in clusters shifting their meetings from the Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC) in Rafah to communities in Deir Al Balah and Khan Yunis. The lastest meeting took place in Gaza City on 25 April.

The ETC met with partners UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) on 27 April to review and understand the latest equipment needs submitted to COGAT for importation and installation to upgrade the UNDSS-managed Security Operations Centre (SOC) in Gaza. The ETC coordinator is engaging UNDSS to finalize the equipment needs.

### Internet connectivity

Most humanitarian responders in Rafah continue to rely on direct internet services from Paltel and Ajyal ISPs.

The ETC is engaging the UNDSS and OCHA to understand their plan for internet connectivity at the newly proposed JHOC in Deir Al Balah. The ETC is preparing to fill in the data connectivity gap by providing a reliable common shared service.

### Security communications

On 24 April, COGAT authorized the ETC to import four VHF repeaters, 50 handheld radios, and cabling to set up a reliable and secure communications platform for humanitarian responders across operational sites in Gaza. The ETC also requested authorization from COGAT to import independent solar energy solution kits to power the VHF radio repeaters and enable adequate uninterrupted services for all sites which will host the devices in selected ETC common operational areas across Gaza.

Due to the protracted funding challenges in this operation, the ETC is currently unable to purchase the complete SCS kits to be installed per operational site, for which quotations were received on 20 April. The ETC plans to install a kit at each site in Deir Al Balah, Gaza City, and Jabalia. Additionally, COGAT requires the ETC to provide the exact Global Position System (GPS) coordinates of the sites where the SCS equipment will be initially stored and eventually installed. The ETC cannot currently fulfil the request as joint inter-agency ICT assessments are still ongoing to identify the sites for safe, secure storage of equipment and eventual installation.

The ETC is leading the dismantling of the complete VHF radio repeater site at the UNRWA–managed Al Shaboura Clinic in Rafah for relocation, installation, and use in Deir Al Balah to ensure a reliable and secure communications platform for humanitarian responders.

### Access to information for affected communities

First Responder Radio and UNICEF have imported and prepositioned in Rafah all accessories except the transmitter to set up an FM broadcasting service for access to information for communities. This follows the ETC's technical recommendations and advice to both humanitarian partners on the COGAT prerequisites for licensing and importing FM broadcasting equipment into Gaza. First Responder Radio and UNICEF are engaging COGAT for the authorization to import the radio transmitter. The ETC will engage with the humanitarian partners to provide guidance and support for public messaging and access to information for communities in Gaza once the FM broadcasting tool is set up.

### Staffing

There are currently four ETC staff engaged in the response:

- A new ETC coordinator is based in Cairo since 20 April while the outgoing deputy ETC coordinator departed Cairo on 30 April;
- A new ETC field coordinator is based in Gaza since 22 April;
- The ETC ICT specialist has been in Gaza since 15 April to support agencies and partners with technical advice and guidance on telecommunications services;
- A Global ETC Information Management Officer (IMO) is remotely supporting the operation from Dubai, UAE, since 22 April while efforts to recruit a local IMO are ongoing.

# Dashboard

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

# Funding

The ETC urgently requires US$1.8 million requested in the revised Flash Appeal to address urgent and critical lifesaving efforts in Gaza until 31 December 2024. The revised occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) Flash Appeal, incorporating ETC's budget requirement of US$1.8 million was published by OCHA on 17 April.

On 15 April, the ETC developed a factsheet with updated information and funding requirements aligned with the revised Flash Appeal to facilitate the fund-raising efforts to support its coordination and information management activities until December 2024.

# Challenges

Based on the information available, the UN intends to reduce personnel presence in Gaza to a maximum of 15 with only three WFP international staff, due to the prevailing security situation. The ETC staff are not included among the three international staff and will be requested to evacuate once the plan is implemented at a date yet to be confirmed. The decision will negatively impact the implementation of ETC activities across Gaza.

The safety concerns of humanitarian aid workers in Gaza have significantly intensified, following the killing of seven humanitarian aid workers on 01 April.

Limited access to electricity, fuel, and telecommunications services continues to impede the humanitarian response in Gaza. The Importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is prolonged and extremely challenging.

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

The issuance of entry visas for staff remains prolonged and challenging.

Cybersecurity continues to be a pressing issue. Caution in using technology platforms applies, including the use of social media and press platforms.

# Meetings

The next Global ETC Teleconference with partners on the response in Gaza will be held on **Wednesday 08 May 2024 at 11:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on 17 April 2024. 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**

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