Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #28
Reporting period: 07/05/2024 to 13/05/2024

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

Highlights

- On 06 May, the ETC successfully relocated, installed, and tested the complete VHF radio repeater system and a solar power solution from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Al Shaboura Clinic in Rafah to the WFP guesthouse in Deir Al Balah to ensure a reliable and secure communications platform for humanitarian responders. The intervention followed the information provided by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) to evacuate from Rafah starting on 06 May.

- The ETC is collaborating with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNRWA to identify and assess a suitable building in Deir Al Balah for the setup of the new Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC).

- The import clearance for the 30 pre-approved VHF digital radios that arrived at Tel Aviv airport on 02 April is ongoing with facilitation from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The ETC installs a VHF radio repeater mast in Deir Al Balah, Gaza. Photo: WFP/ETC

Situation overview

The ETC in Rafah have dismantled and packed all equipment and are moving to Deir Al Balah where a new JHOC will be set up in anticipation of the heightening hostilities in Rafah. The IDF informed the public and humanitarian responders to evacuate from Rafah, starting on 06 May. Ground incursions and heavy fighting also continue to be reported south of Gaza city and in eastern Rafah, including the area of Kerem Shalom and Rafah crossings. The incursion is negatively impacting on ETC operations in the south.

Meanwhile, communities in Gaza are moving to a humanitarian zone called Al-Mawasi located 20 kilometres north of Rafah. Al-Mawasi is situated 16 kilometres southwest of Deir Al Balah.

Authorities closed the Rafah border crossing for both cargo and passengers on 07 May. UN agencies and other humanitarian responders who hold Israeli visas are exiting Gaza through the Kerem Shalom border crossing.

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 and protection 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 Gaza.

Humanitarian operations in Gaza continue to face severe humanitarian access restrictions, including the ongoing closure of key crossings, denials of planned missions, and delays in movements imposed by the authorities and recurrent intense hostilities. Critical telecommunications importation process remains lengthy and restricted.

Telecommunications Overview

Voice services provided by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational at 40-50% capacity due to limited fuel and a congested network due to very few operational telecommunications towers. 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.

Due to the prevailing escalated hostilities, the local MNOs, and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are experiencing network outages from damaged infrastructure, limited access to fuel, and insecure conditions to carry out repairs. The current conditions make it difficult to maintain the remaining functional network.

Paltel and Ajyal 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 is collaborating with OCHA and UNRWA to identify and assess a suitable building in Deir Al Balah for the setup of the new JHOC. In the interim, OCHA has offered its guesthouse in Deir Al Balah to host approximately 40 participants to enable meeting attendance starting 08 May.

Equipment Importation

The import clearance for the 30 pre-approved VHF digital radios that arrived at Tel Aviv airport on 02 April is ongoing with facilitation from UNDP. The ETC has shared all required clearance documents with UNDP. Once cleared, the radios will be configured by UNDSS in Jerusalem and further distributed to UN agencies in Gaza.

The ETC received a solar power solution capable of powering small ICT devices and equipment, which has been cleared by customs and stored at the WFP Palestine office in Jerusalem, awaiting COGAT approval for import into Gaza.

Internet connectivity

OCHA has requested the ETC to assess and identify an ISP for the provision of internet connectivity at their Deir Al Balah guesthouse. Most humanitarian responders in Deir Al Balah are yet to identify and engage a local ISP for connectivity services.

Security communications

On 06 May, the ETC successfully relocated, installed, and tested the complete VHF radio repeater system and a solar power solution from Al Shaboura Clinic in Rafah to the WFP guesthouse in Deir Al Balah to keep it functional 24/7 and to ensure a reliable and secure communications platform for humanitarian responders. On 08 May, the ETC further tested the signal coverage radius for all areas within the repeater range to confirm connectivity status—the VHF radio network is now functioning in Deir Al Balah. As the site is not yet linked to the server in Jerusalem, the ETC is following up with UNDSS to connect it via a local ISP to enable VHF radio programming and remote monitoring from Jerusalem.

The cluster is engaging UNDSS to locate all VHF radios currently in Gaza to assess their compatibility with the repeater in Deir Al Balah once the site is active and quantify the current need for VHF radios and satellite phones amongst UN humanitarian agencies.

ETC is engaging OCHA and UNDSS in Gaza to secure a strategic site in Gaza City in preparation for equipment installation to provide security communications services. The ETC assessed the site in early May, which indicated a broad and strong VHF signal coverage there. The site once hosted a complete Security Communications System (SCS) infrastructure, but some of the equipment has been lost and damaged during the ongoing conflict. The ETC is engaging COGAT for approval to purchase the missing equipment and prepare to reactivate the site.

The ETC in collaboration with UNDSS are scheduled to meet the local SCS equipment supplier at a date to be scheduled to clarify the status of the VHF licensing restrictions, renew the service-level agreement, and enable the programming of VHF radios for use by humanitarian responders in Gaza.

The ETC provided the requirements for security communications services that include the need for various types of communications devices for coordination purposes with actors involved in the Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS) operations.

Staffing

There are currently four ETC staff engaged in the response:

- The ETC coordinator continues to remotely coordinate activities in Gaza from his duty station in Cairo since 20 April;

- The ETC field coordinator is based in Gaza since 22 April to strengthen face-to-face engagements and support partners with technical advice and guidance;

- 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.

Factsheet

See the **ETC Factsheet** for further information and funding requirements.

Funding

The ETC urgently requires US$1.8 million requested in the revised occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) Flash Appeal to address urgent and critical lifesaving efforts in Gaza until 31 December 2024. On 13 May, the ETC received US$415,000 bringing the total funding status to 23% of the US$1.8 million requested in the revised Flash Appeal to undertake its activities and address the immediate communication needs in Gaza. The revised Flash Appeal, incorporating ETC's budget requirement of US$1.8 million was published by OCHA on 17 April.

Challenges

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 with shifting requirements.

Access to secure areas is a challenge to expand and deploy common services.

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 **Tuesday 14 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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