

Immediate steps to provide humanitarian health assistance in the occupied Palestinian territory

18 July 2006

Introduction

With the recent onset of security escalations in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), the region's deteriorating health situation is becoming a crisis which demands immediate response. When the escalation's effects are combined with problems arising from conflict in the oPt in the last five years and the recent financial crisis of the Palestinian MoH, the need for an urgent and thorough international response becomes even more clear.

- The Gaza power plant, providing about 43% of the power consumed in the Gaza Strip, has been destroyed, leaving the population to rely on generators which are available in all hospitals and about 50% of primary health care (PHC) centers. The MoH consumption of fuel ranges between 26,400 to 40,000 liters/day for 16 to 24 hrs/day operation. In addition, the MoH requires 20,000 liters of benzene and 20,000 liters of diesel for its vehicles, including ambulances.
- The Gaza Strip contains 24 hospitals (30.77% of the total in oPt) with an average bed capacity per hospital of 79.88 beds. The total number of comprehensive PHC clinics in Gaza is 119 in addition to 28 maternal and child health clinics.
- The electricity shortages are also affecting water supply in the oPt as water pumps for the 132 water wells in the Gaza Strip are not fully functioning. The Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) is distributing water for 4 hrs/day for each neighborhood, and WHO is monitoring incidences of diarrhea in order to track any related potential effects.
- All crossings into and out of Gaza, including the Rafah crossing, are currently closed. A monthly average of 500-700 patients crossed Rafah in order to seek care in Egypt and other countries before the closure; border crossings are currently impossible.

Impact on Health

- The emergency three months' essential drugs stocks held at the MoH pharmaceutical stores in the Gaza Strip are running low, and 23% of the most essential drugs will be out of stock within one month. Many of these items are critical, such as heparin, atropine and adrenaline. Medical supplies are also running low including such staples as surgical plaster, sutures, needles and canula.
- The possibility of increased casualties raises concern over the sector's capacity to respond to large numbers of injured persons. The disruption to the road network around the middle governorate will further hinder the transfer of wounded patients from southern Gaza to the main referral hospital (Shifa hospital) in Gaza city.
- According to UNRWA notification on communicable diseases, the total number of watery diarrhea cases have increased in the last two weeks (26 June-02 July and 03-09 July) by 163% and 152% respectively, while the increase in cases of bloody diarrhea was 140% and 137% respectively compared to the same period last year.

- Water shortage remains a problem due to lack of power to the water pumps, and the CMWU¹ is implementing a rotation system to provide households with water.
- The lack of electricity also affects the waste water treatment and disposal. As a result, concern for public health problems of insects and sewage leaks to underground water were raised by the MoH and the Palestinian Environmental Authority.
- Continuous power is required for the preservation of cold chain items, food for patients, for emergency operations and at the Central Drugs Store.
- Per its emergency plan, the MoH assigned 21 PHC in Gaza Strip to function as emergency centers. Currently; twelve of them are working for 24 hours per day and another four are working for twelve hours per day. All other PHC services including Mother and Child Health, Food Inspection, Health Education, Nutrition, Surveillance and Epidemiology and others remain functioning.
- Concern has also been raised about food safety as a result cooling system interruptions at both the household and industrial level. Fishing is not permitted due to a siege on the coast, thus aggravating concerns of protein unavailability.
- The shortage of electricity is hampering the pumping of water into the public water network. Solid waste disposal and sewage disposal are also affected by shortages of fuel, necessary to transport garbage away from residential areas.

WHO planned action

While providing general humanitarian support within the framework of the CAP 2006, WHO should undertake the following steps to cope with this escalating crisis:

- a) Strengthen its presence in Gaza to cope with increasing demand for health coordination;
- b) Provide incentives to health and environmental workers;
- c) In full coordination with other humanitarian actors, identify, purchase and distribute medicines and consumables needed by clinics and hospitals to deal with increased demands, especially of injuries, mental health issues and communicable disease prevention;
- d) To provide logistic support to hospitals delivering emergency services.

Budget for one month (July-August 06)

Item	Budget in USD
Decentralized support to MOH and NGOs in Gaza	60,000
Incentives to all MOH staff	800,000
Environmental sanitation and cleaning of living areas	200,000
New generator and maintenance for hospitals	200,000
Essential drugs, supplies and kits for one month	500,000
Project management, monitoring and reporting	176,000
PSC	135,520
Total	2,071,520

¹ Costal Municipal Water Utility