Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #33
Reporting period: 11/06/2024 to 18/06/2024

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

Highlights

- On 16 June, the 30 pre-approved Very High Frequency (VHF) digital radios were transported into Gaza upon the clearance received by the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) on 14 June. The obtaining of transportation clearance and transportation of the radios into Gaza was facilitated by the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The ETC is coordinating to handover the radios to the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) to facilitate their distribution among the UN agencies operating in Gaza.

- On 14 June, the ETC coordinated with the Logistics Cluster to facilitate the transportation of the solar-powered kits into Gaza from Jerusalem, which is approved for importation by COGAT.

- On 13 June, the ETC met with Gilat Telecom—a COGAT-approved Israeli vendor—to identify viable satellite-based data solutions for Gaza. The ETC is awaiting technical details and cost estimates on various solutions from Gilat Telecom.

Solar-powered solution kits awaiting logistical arrangement for transportation into Gaza from Jerusalem. Photo: WFP/ETC

- On 11 June, Jordan, Egypt, and the UN co-organized a high-level conference titled "Call for Action" to urgently strengthen the humanitarian response in Gaza, as fuel shortages and access constraints continue to severely disrupt the delivery of life-saving aid.

Situation overview

The security situation in Gaza remains volatile due to the continuing hostilities. Humanitarian operations continue within the limited parameters and responders continue to observe all security measures and protocols, including seeking approved movement authorization. Ground incursions and heavy fighting continue to be reported across Gaza, including in Bedit Hanoun, south of Gaza City, eastern Deir al Balah, northeastern Khan Younis, as well as in eastern, central, and western Rafah.

On 11 June, Jordan, Egypt, and the UN co-organized a high-level conference titled "Call for Action" to urgently strengthen the humanitarian response in Gaza, as fuel shortages and access constraints continue to severely disrupt the delivery of life-saving aid.

Since 06 May, intensified hostilities following the issuance of evacuation orders and the ground incursion by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in Rafah has displaced about one million people amid a

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decline in the entry of humanitarian aid, further crippling the humanitarian operations. Assessments by humanitarian organizations over the past month have highlighted the dire conditions facing displaced families, with significant challenges to their ability to access basic services. The situation has also compelled most of the humanitarian actors to relocate to Deir Al Balah, resulting in most of the humanitarian offices in Rafah being non-operational.

Telecommunications Overview

Voice services provided by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational at limited 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 is worsening as displaced people relocate from Rafah to other locations in the North. Internet Service Provider (ISP)—Paltel—continues to provide internet services in parts of Rafah, Deir Al Balah, Jabalia, and Gaza City, though with intermittent connectivity.

Due to the prevailing escalated hostilities, the local MNOs and ISPs are experiencing network outages from damaged infrastructure, limited access to fuel, and insecure conditions to carry out repairs. These conditions make it difficult to maintain the remaining functional network. The sporadic access to connectivity has severely disrupted humanitarian aid operations and communication with the humanitarian responders on the ground.

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

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC coordinator is based in Deir Al Balah to boost coordination activities on the ground and support humanitarian actors operating in Gaza with their technical needs, guidance, and advice, given the limited availability of telecommunications services in Gaza.

On 13 June, the ETC met with Gilat Telecom—a COGAT-approved Israeli vendor—to identify viable satellite-based data solutions for Gaza. The ETC is awaiting technical details and cost estimates on various solutions from Gilat Telecom.

On 13 June, the ETC attended the Area-Based Coordination (ABC) meetings in Deir Al Balah and Khan Yunis to strengthen the collaboration and engagement with partners and agencies operating in Gaza.

On 14 June, the ETC coordinated with the Logistics Cluster to facilitate the transportation of the solar-powered kits into Gaza from Jerusalem, which is approved for importation by COGAT.

Since 15 June, the Joint Humanitarian Operations Centre (JHOC) meetings have been rescheduled to occur three times a week (Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays) instead of six times a week.

The ETC is engaging with key humanitarian leads to strengthen advocacy efforts concerning the challenges humanitarian agencies and partners face in importing ICT and telecommunications equipment into Gaza to establish common communications services.

Internet connectivity

The reduced internet services capacity and recurrent connectivity disruptions across Gaza continues to severely affect life-saving humanitarian aid access, especially in Deir Al Balah where most of the humanitarian responders are now based. The local ISP faces multiple challenges, including reduced staff, lack of spare parts and safe access to repair and maintain the remaining network services.

To address the urgent need for connectivity services, the ETC is engaging with the local ISP to prioritize strengthening internet connectivity services in Deir Al Balah. The ETC is liaising with agencies and partners for technical advice and assessments and coordinating with the ISP to establish connectivity services at their new offices and guesthouses in Deir Al Balah following the relocation from Rafah.

Following the expansion of humanitarian response in Gaza, a need has been identified to establish an operational hub in Gaza City, potentially at the premises of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The ETC is scheduled to conduct an assessment to identify their connectivity and equipment needs on 22 June. The ETC is also scheduled to conduct further assessment at the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations (PNGO) network location in Deir Al Balah on 20 June.

The ETC is scheduled to conduct an assessment on 20 June to identify additional service needs at a new JHOC which is planned to be established at the Japanese Health Centre based in Deir Al Balah. Currently, the facility is equipped with internet connectivity service supported by UNRWA.

The ETC is scheduled to participate in the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) site assessment on 19 June to facilitate the establishment of a potential operational hub in Jabalia. The ETC will mainly support in the identification of connectivity services and power supply needs.

The ETC has contacted its global partners to offer solutions for the emergency internet deployment kits in response to the high demand for reliable internet service in Gaza. The ETC is collaborating with its global partners to initiate the prerequisites of customs clearance upon arrival in Jerusalem and secure approval by COGAT for importation into Gaza. These devices are intended for use at new JHOCs, and the equipment will be prepositioned to address immediate needs in Gaza.

Security communications

On 16 June, the 30 pre-approved VHF digital radios were transported into Gaza after the anticipated import clearance from COGAT was received on 14 June. The obtaining of import clearance and transportation of the radios into Gaza was facilitated by OCHA. The 30 radios were prepared with assigned call signs and programmed at the UNDSS server in Jerusalem on 28 May. The ETC team is coordinating to handover the radios to UNDSS to facilitate their distribution among the UN agencies operating in Gaza. As of 13 June, the ETC team received confirmation that approximately 50 additional VHF radios belonging to different UN agencies are available with UNDSS in Jerusalem for the use of UN agencies in Gaza. The ETC team is coordinating with OCHA to secure approval to transport these radios into Gaza.

On 15 June, the ETC received confirmation that Track24, a satellite-based staff movement tracking devices, has been pre-approved by COGAT for the use of UN agencies in their armoured vehicles in Gaza. The devices will allow real-time monitoring of mission movements inside Gaza Strip, ensuring safety of personnel.

On 15 June, The ETC team engaged with UNDSS in Gaza to seek clarity on how Security Operations Centres (SOCs) in Gaza and Jerusalem supplement each other in terms of operational modalities alongside sharing the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and identifying additional equipment and human resources to facilitate the full operation of the SOCs. The SOC in Gaza has been operational 24/7 at a limited capacity, equipped with basic tools and three dedicated SOC operators. The ETC is engaging with local vendors in Jerusalem and supporting UNDSS in procuring ICT equipment for the

SOCs in Gaza and Jerusalem. The SOCs will be equipped with essential satellite-based communications devices to monitor staff movement and real-time locations during field missions in Gaza, ensuring personnel safety.

On 14 June, the ETC team visited the UNRWA operational centre, which is operational 24/7 with seven dedicated staff, temporarily located in Deir Al Balah. The centre is equipped with basic tools such as GSM phone, VHF analogue radio coverage in Deir Al Balah and Khan Yunis, Track24 (a satellite-based tracking device) for internal staff monitoring. A further Focused Group Discussion is suggested to assess additional equipment requirements.

Staffing

There are currently three dedicated ETC staff engaged in the response:

- The ETC coordinator is based in Deir Al Balah and has been in Gaza since 24 May to boost ETC presence on the ground and coordinate and support humanitarian actors operating in Gaza.

- The ETC field coordinator arrived in Deir Al Balah on 06 June to resume duties, strengthen face-to-face engagements, and support partners with technical advice and guidance.

- A dedicated ETC Information Management Officer (IMO) is based in Cairo since 02 June to support the response.

- The ETC ICT specialist concluded his mission on 16 June—he had been supporting the response since the activation of the ETC in Gaza in October 2023. The ICT Specialist has been in Jerusalem since 21 May, coordinating with OCHA to transport VHF radios into Gaza and with UNDSS to assess the capacity to establish a SOC in Jerusalem.

Dashboard

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

Infographic

See the **ETC Infographic** for an overview of activities data, information, and location of planned and operational services.

Factsheet

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

Funding

The ETC requires a total of 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 2024, the ETC received US$415,000 from the Government of Poland to set up common ICT services. A further US$158,228 from the US Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) was received on 21 May 2024 to support the maritime logistics project with communications services.

Currently, the ETC is 31.8% funded out of the US$1.8 million requested in the revised Flash Appeal to undertake cluster activities and address the immediate communications needs in Gaza.

Challenges

Safety of staff: The safety of humanitarian aid workers in Gaza is a primary concern and priority. The deployment of shared ETC communications services and face-to-face technical support to other humanitarian responders remains a challenge due to insecurity.

Movement of staff: Since 07 May, staff movement in and out of Gaza has been restricted across all border crossing points, delaying staff rotation, and affecting humanitarian activities.

Limited telecommunications services: Due to the prevailing escalated hostilities, the local MNOs and ISPs are experiencing network outages due to 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.

Lack of telecommunications equipment: The availability of telecommunications equipment on the ground is severely restricted, and much has been damaged or destroyed. Further, the importation of telecommunications equipment into Gaza is restricted and prolonged. Only 20 satellite phones, 30 digital VHF radios, four VHF repeaters and four solar power solutions have been approved for importation into Gaza by the Israeli authorities since 07 October 2023.

Internet connectivity: Lack of internet connectivity in Deir Al Balah is hampering the reactivation of the SCS network. The SCS network is unavailable across the rest of Gaza due to damaged equipment and restrictions on SCS equipment importation.

Funding: Insufficient funding has limited the ETC in addressing the immediate life-saving communications needs for humanitarian responders in Gaza. The ETC continues to appeal for funding from varied potential donors.

Cybersecurity continues to be a pressing issue. Caution should be applied when using technology platforms, including social media and press platforms.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Teleconference with partners on the response in Gaza will be held on **Tuesday 25 June 2024 at 11:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on 11 June 2024. All minutes are uploaded **here**.

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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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