Palestine – Conflict

ETC Situation Report #35
Reporting period: 26/06/2024 to 01/07/2024

Highlights

- On 26 June, the ETC met with the Office of the Quartet[1] and Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Jawwal and Ooredoo—to assess the telecommunications situation in Gaza. The meeting highlighted the advocacy need for the provision of fuel and spare parts required for repairs and restoration of services amid the destruction of critical telecommunications infrastructure in Gaza. The ETC is engaging with key stakeholders to ensure the availability of fuel to keep telecommunications services operational.

Inter-agency assessment in Gaza City. Photo: UNICEF/ Wondayferam

- On 26 June, the ETC met with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) to clarify the operational modality of the two Security Operations Centres (SOCs) located in Gaza and Jerusalem and identify additional Information and Communications Technology (ICT) equipment needs and operational gaps. A local vendor in Jerusalem has confirmed they will start delivering ICT equipment to UNDSS in Jerusalem, while ETC will continue to follow up with the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) to secure approval to import these devices into Gaza.

- The ETC team reached out to the heads of UN agencies, asking them to confirm their interest by 24 June in obtaining Track24, a satellite-based staff movement tracking system. In response, 11 UN agencies have confirmed their interest in a total of 73 devices. The ETC has submitted the approval request to COGAT to import these devices into Gaza in coordination with OCHA. The procurement of devices is in progress.

Situation overview

The security situation in Gaza remains volatile due to the continuing hostilities. Israeli bombardment from the air, land, and sea, as well as ground incursions and heavy fighting continue to be reported across much of the Gaza Strip, resulting in further civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction of houses and other civilian infrastructure. The recent OCHA Humanitarian Situation Update reports that, overnight on 27 June, at least 60,000 people were displaced from areas east and northeast of Gaza City and moved westwards.

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 decline in the entry of humanitarian aid, further crippling the humanitarian operations. Assessments by

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[1] The Office of the Quartet was established to support the Palestinian people to build the institutions and economy of a viable, peaceful state in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem

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 humanitarian responders to relocate to Deir Al Balah, resulting in most of the humanitarian offices in Rafah being temporarily closed and non-operational.

The Kerem Shalom border crossing, which was operational at a limited capacity for transporting humanitarian aid supplies into Gaza, is now suspended due to security incidents. Erez West is the only crossing for importing humanitarian aid supplies into Gaza.

Telecommunications Overview

Voice services provided by MNOs—Jawwal and Ooredoo—are operational at limited capacity due to limited fuel and a congested network due to very few operational telecommunications towers. However, Ooredoo services are completely unavailable in Jabalia. 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.

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

The scarcity of fuel for the operation of critical telecommunications infrastructure is at its peak, causing MNOs and ISPs to operate at a limited capacity and pushing them to the verge of shutting down their services completely. Intermittent access to connectivity services has severely disrupted humanitarian aid operations and communication with humanitarian responders on the ground.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC field 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 29 June, the ETC field coordinator engaged in the Inter-Cluster assessment, focusing on identifying the telecommunications, internet connectivity, and power solutions situation in Gaza City.

On 28 June, the ETC participated in the Area Security Management Team (ASMT) meeting in Deir Al Balah, which focused on endorsing the Gaza Security Risk Management (SRM) process. The heads of UN agencies were also asked to provide their confirmation for the consolidated procurement of the Track24 devices, which is facilitated by the ETC. The ETC provided an update on the progress made in importing approximately 50 VHF radios and four solar-powered solutions, which are being coordinated with OCHA for clearance to import them into Gaza.

During the reporting period, the ETC submitted 11 requests containing 73 Track24 devices to COGAT for approval to import them into Gaza.

On 28 June, the ETC field coordinator attended the Area-Based Coordination (ABC) meeting in Rafah to strengthen the collaboration and engagement with partners and agencies operating in Gaza. A meeting highlighted the high level of destruction in the area since the Rafah incursion on 06 May.

On 28 June, the ETC field coordinator participated in the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) meeting, which focused on the UN2720 Mechanism, a database established to channel and register all humanitarian relief consignments destined for Gaza via the Jordan Corridor for pre-clearance. The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and information on the mechanism have been shared with ICCG members.

On 26 June, the ETC met with the Office of the Quartet and MNOs—Jawwal and Ooredoo—to assess the telecommunications situation in Gaza. The meeting highlighted the advocacy need for the provision of fuel and spare parts required for repairs and restoration of services amid the destruction of critical telecommunications infrastructure in Gaza. The ETC is engaging with key stakeholders to ensure the availability of fuel to keep telecommunications services operational. The current situation could potentially lead to the complete shutdown of telecommunications services in Gaza.

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

Internet connectivity

The reduced capacity of internet services and the recurrent connectivity disruptions across Gaza continue 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—Paltel— 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 is coordinating with the ISP to establish connectivity services at their new offices and guesthouses in Deir Al Balah following the relocation from Rafah.

Security communications

The ETC is in the process of submitting the approval request to COGAT to import approximately 50 VHF radios located in Jerusalem, which belong to different UN agencies, and is coordinating with OCHA to secure approval to transport these radios into Gaza. These 50 radios are in addition to the 30 pre-approved VHF digital radios that were transported into Gaza on 16 June, facilitated by OCHA after the import clearance from COGAT was received. The ETC team is coordinating to hand over the radios to WFP, UNDSS, and other agencies operating in Gaza.

On 26 June, the ETC met with UNDSS to seek clarity on the operational modality of the two SOCs located in Gaza and Jerusalem and to identify additional ICT equipment needs and operational gaps. A local vendor in Jerusalem has confirmed they will start delivering ICT equipment to UNDSS in Jerusalem, while the ETC will continue to follow up with COGAT to secure approval to import these devices into Gaza. There is also a need for training for SOC operators from UNDSS. The primary SOC in Gaza has been operational 24/7 at a limited capacity and is equipped with basic tools and three dedicated operators. The ETC is engaging with local vendors in Jerusalem to procure IT and satellite-based solutions and supporting UNDSS in procuring ICT equipment for the SOCs in Gaza and Jerusalem to be fully operational.

WFP offered to facilitate the procurement of Track24 solutions to other UN agencies on 22 June. The ETC team subsequently reached out to the heads of UN agencies, asking them to confirm their interest by 24 June to consolidate the procurement list. In response, 11 UN agencies have confirmed their interest in a total of 73 devices. The ETC has submitted the approval request to COGAT to import these devices into Gaza in coordination with OCHA. The procurement of devices is in progress.

Staffing

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

- The ETC coordinator is scheduled to return to Gaza on 09 July following a short break. The coordinator has been in Gaza from 24 May until 27 June to boost ETC presence on the ground and coordinate and support partners and agencies 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) has been based in Cairo since 02 June to support the response.

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, 25 Track24 devices, 30 digital VHF radios, four VHF repeaters and four solar power solutions have been approved for importation into Gaza by COGAT 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 09 July 2024 at 11:00 UTC**.

The previous Global ETC Teleconference was held on 25 June 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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