



FACT SHEET: Children of the Gaza Crisis

6 January 2009

Save the Children is calling for a peaceful solution to the current crisis that endangers the lives of nearly every child in Gaza, and the lives of Israeli children in areas subject to attacks. Save the Children is calling for a cessation of hostilities by all parties including air and ground assaults from Israel and rocket attacks from Gaza. The agency is also seeking free access for humanitarian assistance to allow aid agencies to provide much-needed relief to vulnerable children and so that children and their families can access essential services. Save the Children has reached some 6,000 people, including 3,000 children, in the first 10 days of the crisis, and we continue to strive to meet the needs of Gaza's vulnerable children and families.

Save the Children seeks to highlight the situation for children living in what the United Nations is calling “a humanitarian crisis coupled with a massive lack of protection for civilians.”

General

- The total population of Gaza is 1,417,000. ([PCBS](#))
- The total number of children in Gaza is approximately 793,520, or 56% of the population. ([PCBS](#))
- There are a total of 1,048,125 refugees in Gaza, or 74% of the total population. Among them, approximately 586,950 are children. ([UNRWA](#))

Child fatalities to date

- At least 101 children have been killed as a result of the Gaza conflict since it began 11 days ago. ([Al Mezan](#))
- As of 5 January, the Palestinian Ministry of Health reported that at least 2,550 Palestinians have been injured, of whom 1,134 are children and women. ([WHO](#))

Displacement:

Of increasing concern is the number of children and their families fleeing the fighting and bombardment or seeking refuge because their homes have been destroyed or damaged. UNRWA has identified 91 schools to serve as displacement shelters, with a capacity of to house 40,000 people. However two of these shelters have been hit with shelling so far, causing considerable casualties. All UNRWA schools are clearly marked as UN premises with coordinates provided to the military .

- On 6 January UNRWA Jabalia Prep C Girls School, currently sheltering people displaced by the conflict, was hit by three shells, resulting in at least 30 fatalities and 55 injuries, many critical. ([OCHA](#))
- Asma Elementary School — another clearly marked UNRWA shelter serving around 400 displaced people from Beit Hanoun, including approximately 224 children — was struck by a missile 6 January, killing three people. ([UNRWA](#))
- As of the morning of 6 January, over 14,000 people, among them an estimated 7,840 children, are staying in 23 emergency UNRWA shelters. The number of displaced families is quickly increasing, and UNRWA is facing a serious deficit of essential supplies such as blankets and mattresses. ([OCHA](#))

Access to water, sanitation and electricity

Children, especially infants, are particularly affected by the lack of clean water and electricity.

- An estimated 1 million people, including 560,000 children, are currently living without water or power. ([OCHA](#))
- 800,000 people, among them approximately 448,000 children, in North Gaza, Gaza and the Middle Area have no running water as of 6 January. Those who have access to water face difficulties in purifying it, which is particularly important considering the high risk of contamination due to wastewater leakage. ([OCHA](#))
- In Beit Lahiya, the health of 15,000 people including approximately 8,400 children is at risk from sewage flooding from the wastewater treatment lagoon ([OCHA](#)). The sewage level is currently rising quickly due to a lack of fuel to power pumps. Should the level continue to rise at its current rate, the lake will be close to overflowing within the next week with corresponding risk of flooding the surrounding communities. ([OCHA](#))

Education

To date 16 schools have been damaged from airstrikes and related bombardment in Gaza. Of these, five received direct hits. In Israel, two schools have been hit by rockets fired from Gaza. Of note:

- Eight UNRWA students were killed and another 18 injured while waiting for UN buses. ([OCHA](#))
- Military operations began at 11:30 a.m. on 27 December 2008, when many students were leaving or coming to school and when many others were sitting for exams. Some students were injured when school windows shattered. ([OCHA](#))
- The final exams of the current semester were disrupted and have been postponed because of the ongoing conflict, which started on the first day of final exams. ([OCHA](#))
- Gaza's 346 government schools, 28 private schools and 214 UNRWA schools are closed, affecting around 441,452 students. ([UNRWA](#)) and ([MoE](#))
- Three schools participating in the Protective Sphere project were partially damaged by air strikes. All are in the northern area of Gaza.
- The American School was almost completely destroyed by shelling, killing the 21-year-old guard; three to five other schools were also damaged. ([OCHA](#))
- 13 UNRWA schools were damaged 31 December 2008. ([OCHA](#))
- Two schools in southeastern Israel have been damaged by rocket fire from Gaza. ([Jerusalem Post](#))
- There are reports of the closure of all Israeli schools within 20 kilometers of Gaza. ([Israel National News](#))

Health Care Infrastructure

Lack of access to health care remains critical for children and pregnant women, as movement inside Gaza is extremely dangerous. To date, four hospitals and three clinics have been damaged by shelling. Of these, three hospitals have taken direct hits¹. In addition:

- All 56 of the Gaza's primary health care clinics are officially functioning with interruptions and limitations due to security and limitations on movement. ([WHO](#))
- To date three mobile clinics and three ambulances have been destroyed, and six medical personnel have been killed. ([WHO](#))
- Thirty infants in the neonatal care unit at Shifa hospital, which is currently relying on back-up generators, are surviving with the help of lifesaving machines. However, the facility's generators are in danger of failing ([OCHA](#)). All Gaza City hospitals have been without electricity since 3 January, running only on back-up generators dependent on scarce fuel supplies ([WHO](#)).
- Patients (including infants and children) are standing in very long queues in front of the dispensing windows at UNRWA Primary Health Care Facilities (Save the Children sources).

¹ Telephone information from Al Mezan.

- On 6 January, the UNRWA health clinic in Bureij camp was hit by a missile, injuring 10 people, including 7 UNRWA personnel. ([OCHA](#))
- On 4 January, an ambulance from Al Awda hospital in northern Gaza was shelled, killing a paramedic and seriously injuring three other people ([OCHA](#)). That same day, a guided missile hit an ambulance east of Gaza city, killing three people ([al Mezan](#)).

Save the Children Case Study

Saleem, 6, was at school taking exams when the air strikes began 27 December 2008.

Saleem's story

"I finished the exam at around 10 in the morning and I started to leave my classroom when, suddenly, I heard a large explosion near the school. My teacher and another teacher dived onto the floor, and I started to be really scared. My classroom is on the second floor. I was afraid to go to the stairs until a teacher came and took all the students to the ground floor.

"Usually my mother comes to pick me up or sends me a taxi. I couldn't find a taxi so I stayed at the school gate, hearing explosions and watching people running away. I felt that I couldn't do anything but stand there. I waited there a while, I don't know how long. Then I saw my mum running to the school to pick me up. We walked home together, about 2.5 kilometres. On the way, there were a lot of explosions everywhere. I heard explosions from the right and left, and I was really scared. My mum tried to ask me how the exam went, but I had forgotten all about that. I just looked around, looking at the flames and smoke coming from the buildings.

"I was really eager to take my exams before, because they were my first-ever final exams. But now I hate exams. I hate school. I hate going to school, whether for classes or for exams. I threw my school bag in the bathroom because I don't want to see it. I don't ever want to go back to school.

"What is going on is something that I don't understand. I don't know what is happening and why this is happening. I feel really cold as my mother and father keep opening the windows of the home so the windows don't smash with the bombs. I feel cold. I keep sneezing all day. When I ask my mother to close the window, they say it's for my own benefit and they're sorry. I've had no electricity for three days. We have no milk, and no dairy products. There is other food though, at the moment. We have vegetables, but we can't get fruit in the market anymore, just oranges.

"My message is to anyone to anyone who will listen – just tell me why and what for."