

Aid funding for Occupied Palestinian Territories at 'all-time low'

Funding for humanitarian operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) is at an "[all-time low](#)", threatening the delivery of life-saving aid to people in the West Bank and Gaza, the United Nations warned on Friday.

So far, only 25 per cent of the nearly \$540 million needed this year has been received, the organization's humanitarian affairs office, [OCHA](#), has reported.

OCHA said the decline in funding for the UN agency assisting Palestine refugees, [UNRWA](#), "has been a key contributing factor."

UNRWA provides education, health care and social services for more than five million Palestine refugees across the Middle East and is the single largest humanitarian agency in the OPT. It is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions from UN member states.

UNRWA chief Pierre Krähenbühl this week described 2018 as "[a year of anguish](#)" for Palestinians, with thousands of young people killed or injured in demonstrations in Gaza and elsewhere.

The outside world appears numb to the tragedy unfolding. – *Jamie McGoldrick, UN Humanitarian Coordinator*

At the same time, his agency has faced "its worst crisis ever", and only has enough money to fund its operations until the end of September. "UNRWA's current shortfall is US\$ 217 million," he told its Advisory Commission on Thursday.

"Specifically, we still need \$123 million for our Program Budget activities, the core of UNRWA's response and \$94 million for our Emergency Appeals. These are considerable amounts, without which operations cannot be ensured until the end of the year."

Overall, two million people in the OPT are in need of "[active protection measures](#)" due to conflict and violence, displacement or restricted access to employment and essential services, according to Jamie McGoldrick, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the region.

He said this has been "particularly evident" in recent weeks following an escalation of hostilities between Palestinian armed groups and the Israeli forces.

"Since 1 July, we have seen the deaths of four Palestinian civilians, including that of a pregnant mother and her toddler child while asleep in their beds in Gaza, and the injury of two Israeli girls by rocket fire in

Sderot, among some 100 Palestinian civilians and nearly 30 Israelis injured. In spite of this, the outside world appears numb to the tragedy unfolding,” he said in a statement issued ahead of [World Humanitarian Day](#), observed this Sunday.

The annual commemoration pays tribute to the aid workers who risk their lives supporting millions worldwide affected by conflict, natural disaster and other emergencies.

Mr. McGoldrick praised humanitarian workers in the OPT, adding that they “regularly face personal risk and assaults on their dignity, often while withstanding the same restrictive conditions that drive the humanitarian crisis” there.

[Continue ‘their mission’ urges UN chief, as the victims of the Baghdad bombing are remembered, 15 years on](#)

Remembering 22 colleagues killed by the “horrific terrorist attack” on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad 15 years ago, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has called on all staff to pay tribute to the fallen by “continuing their mission,” and keep going to “dangerous places with the aim of making them safer”.

In a wreath-laying ceremony at the United Nations Headquarters on Friday in New York, the UN chief reminded those assembled of the Organization’s core commitment – embodied by those who died on 19 August, 2003 – to stand “with those who are suffering, to bring them the relief they need”.

After observing a minute’s silence, he said the fallen UN staff had “made the ultimate sacrifice for the values and the Charter of the United Nations, and for the people of Iraq”.

The ceremony took place in front of the memorial established to commemorate the attack, where the UN flag from the Canal Hotel and the names of the victims are displayed.

“I was personally close to some of those colleagues, including their leader, the incomparable Sergio Vieira de Mello,” he mentioned. “I had the opportunity to be in close contact with him during his time in East Timor where he played an absolutely essential role in guaranteeing the freedom of the people of East Timor and a smooth transition for their sovereignty”.

Addressing the audience, which included families and colleagues of the

deceased, he said “this was a huge personal loss to so many of us. And an even greater blow to the families of those who were killed”.

The attack, which was the first time the UN was deliberately targeted on a massive scale, “was traumatising for the whole organisation, and we learned some very difficult lessons,” said Mr. Guterres, explaining that “the mechanisms in place to look after survivors and the families of victims were inadequate, and it has taken too many years to improve them”.

The UN chief regretted that “before and since that day, United Nations staff have been targeted by those who would like to weaken us and make us afraid to do our jobs.” Referring to attacks against the UN that have taken place in Algiers, Kabul, Mogadishu, Abuja and other locations, he said “terrorists have attempted to silence and to banish us”.

Though he stated that the work of the UN “will never be free from risk,” the Secretary-General stressed that he is “committed to improving security for all United Nations staff”.

“The blue flag of the United Nations flies high because of the brave women and men who carry it to the farthest corners of the world,” he said, adding that “the legacy of the humanitarian workers, the peacekeepers, the military and civilian staff who have given their lives is lasting and will be ever-present in our hearts”.

UN News spoke to some of the survivors of that tragic day.

You can read, and listen to their testimonies [here](#).

[‘No safe way’ into battle-scarred Afghan city of Ghazni to deliver aid as traumatized children search for parents](#)

The city of Ghazni in Afghanistan is still too dangerous for aid workers to reach, after a week of “intense” fighting and reports that traumatized children are turning up at hospitals looking for their parents, UN humanitarian agency, [OCHA](#), said on Friday.

“As of this hour, there is no safe way for civilians or humanitarian workers to enter into Ghazni,” OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke said, adding that

hundreds of civilians are believed to have died since last Friday, in clashes between Taliban fighters and pro-Government forces.

“We estimate that there are some 200-250 civilian casualties, according to the latest unverified numbers,” he said, citing information from the Red Cross in Afghanistan.

Ghazni, in the east of Afghanistan, is one of the country’s largest cities and home to around 270,000 people. It is just the latest place to be affected by an uptick in violence in a country that has experienced more than three decades of protracted conflict, seriously hampering poverty reduction and development.

Although Taliban fighters have been largely driven out of Ghazni city centre after last week’s attacks, house-to-house “clearing operations” are ongoing, according to OCHA.

Amid continuing insecurity, the remaining 25 to 30 aid organizations with a presence in the city “have basically hunkered down”, the agency’s spokesperson told journalists in Geneva.

There are reports of unaccompanied minors turning up at the hospital, looking for their families. – *Jens Laerke (OCHA)*

In the meantime, fighting has reportedly moved to the outskirts of the city, with Taliban fighters slowly withdrawing towards surrounding villages.

But aid workers – and food – still cannot reach the city because of the presence of lethal booby traps, or improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

“One of the main reasons for that is that there are IEDs and mines on the way,” Laerke said. “We do have capacity to actually spot and map where these mines are, but we do not have the capacity to remove them. That is the responsibility and within the capacity of the national government to do so.”

Parts of one of the main access roads, Highway 1, have been reportedly “destroyed, contested or contaminated” with IEDs, according to OCHA, which noted in a statement that the weapons had also been placed along the city’s ring road.

The development follows an uptick in violence in Afghanistan, where 80 so-called conflict incidents were recorded daily between July and September, 2017 – the highest number in six years – the UN agency has [reported](#).

Last year also saw 16 district administrative centres attacked and taken over by the Taliban, OCHA said.

Earlier this week, UN Secretary-General [António Guterres](#) urged warring parties in Afghanistan to step up efforts towards achieving peace following deadly fighting in Ghazni, after condemning a “[heinous](#)” suicide bombing that killed dozens of students – many of them teenagers – at an education centre

in the capital, Kabul.

In a bid to assess needs in Ghazni, OCHA has asked local aid workers still in the city to gather information on the number of people requiring help.

Key priorities include restoring the city's public services. Parts of the water system are functioning again, according to the authorities, and [UN Children's Fund UNICEF](#), is preparing to dispatch chlorine to flush network clean.

Mobile phone networks are also gradually being restored but electricity in the city is reportedly still largely unavailable, OCHA said in a statement.

"The immediate restoration of electricity, to ensure water supply, is a top priority," spokesperson Laerke explained.

Other priorities include providing assistance to all those affected by the violence, particularly youngsters.

"We expect that there will be a very big need for psycho-social support amongst the residents including for children," Laerke said. "There are reports of unaccompanied minors turning up at the hospital, looking for their families."

According to OCHA, 3.3 million people need humanitarian assistance, and there are growing signs that what was once a low-intensity conflict has now escalated into an escalating war, according to a UN strategic review.

['Unconscionable' to kill aid workers, civilians: UN Emergency Coordinator](#)

Each year on 19 August, the world pays tribute to the humanitarians who deliver aid to vulnerable communities in some of the most dangerous crises on the planet; some of whom make the ultimate sacrifice.

"It is unconscionable that civilians and the aid workers who are trying to help them are killed and maimed in conflict zones with utter impunity," said Mark Lowcock, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Humanitarian Affairs chief.

This year, the Day also marks the fifteenth anniversary of the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad, which took the lives of 22 staff and other civilians.

Overall last year, 139 aid workers were killed, 102 wounded and 72 kidnapped in the line of duty, marking the fifth consecutive year in which more than 100 humanitarians lost their lives on the job. Moreover, it is the highest recorded annual death toll since 2013, when 156 humanitarians were killed.

Also in 2017, of the 42,972 people reportedly killed or injured by explosive weapons, three out of every four victims were civilians – a 38 per cent increase on the previous year.

“We need this to end,” Mr. Lowcock stressed.

[Secretary-General António Guterres](#) noted in his [Protection of Civilians report](#) published in May, that attacks in just six conflict-affected countries were responsible for more than 26,000 civilian deaths or injuries, emphasizing that to reverse such high numbers of civilian casualties, required sustained advocacy.

In addition to ensuring safe, unimpeded passage of supplies, Governments and non-State military groups are legally obligated to protect civilians and aid workers in armed conflicts.

“It is imperative that we hold men with guns and power accountable when civilians and aid workers are illegally targeted,” Mr. Lowcock argued.



UNICEF/Kate Holt

Two unaccompanied girls who became separated from their parents during fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sit with workers from Save the Children UK at a UNICEF-assisted child reunification centre near Goma.

3-D portraits of solidarity

For World Humanitarian Day last year, more than two million people around the world participated in an online [#NotATarget](#) campaign, to push for change by telling stories of civilians in war and conflict areas.

Building on that success, this year the UN and humanitarian partners have launched a ‘living petition,’ calling on world leaders to better protect civilians and aid workers.

Global citizens are asked to 'sign' the petition with their selfies through a custom website that transforms their two-dimension photos into 3-D portraits of solidarity.

Their faces are part of an installation at UN Headquarters, and will remain in place throughout the General Assembly, which begins on 18 September.

"The thousands of faces that make up the living petition will be on display to remind world leaders of their legal obligation to protect civilians in conflict," Mr. Lowcock said.

In 2008, the General Assembly designated 19 August as World Humanitarian Day to raise awareness of humanitarian assistance and pay tribute to the people who risk their lives to provide it.

'Step backwards' for Bosnia's autonomous Serb region as assembly reneges on Srebrenica genocide report

The Republika Srpska National Assembly in Bosnia and Herzegovina drew concern from the top United Nations expert on the Prevention of Genocide on Thursday, over its decision this week to revoke its endorsement of the 2004 Srebrenica Commission Report acknowledging genocide during the Bosnian war of the 1990s.

"Rejection of the Commission's findings is a [step backwards](#) for Bosnia and Herzegovina," said Special Adviser Adama Dieng.

"It undermines the rule of law and national and international efforts to achieve justice for victims of crimes committed against people of all ethnicities during the 1992-1995 Bosnian war," he continued.

The war, which killed some 100,000 people, was settled through the Dayton Agreement, brokered in the US city of that same name, which split the former Yugoslav territory into two semi-autonomous ethnic regions divided between Bosnian Muslims and Croats, and Bosnian Serbs.

The Commission, which was set up in 2003 by the Republika Srpska Government, found that from 10 to 19 July 1995, between 7,000 and 8,000 Bosnian Muslims went missing in Srebrenica, and that more than 1,000 Bosnian Muslims were killed – constituting a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

Rejection of the Commission's findings is a step backwards for Bosnia and Herzegovina – *Special Adviser Adama Dieng*

According to news reports, the vote on Tuesday was initiated by Srpska Republika President Milorad Dodik ahead of October elections to mobilize voters around the nationalist agenda.

“Given the timing of this decision,” Mr. Dieng pointed out “it is likely to exacerbate tensions ahead of the 7 October elections and damage prospects for long term stability and reconciliation.”

Many of the Commission’s findings have been verified and confirmed by the verdicts of international, domestic and foreign courts.

The International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia have determined that the massacre of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica constituted genocide.

In July 1995, a Tribunal Judge described the aftermath as “[scenes from hell](#),” written on the darkest pages of human history.”

During his visit back in February, Mr. Dieng observed: “It is evident that events of the past are being used for political purposes.”

He raised concerns over the rejection of judicial verdicts; glorification of war criminals and their crimes; appointment of convicted war criminals to public functions; and the negative impact that these developments would have on prospects for reconciliation in the country.

“Mistrust and outright hostility between political leaders representing different constituencies is preventing any significant progress towards reconciliation,” the Special Adviser concluded.