

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

EGYPT: BORDER CLOSURE AT GAZA / RAFAH

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The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

This Information Bulletin (no. 1/2004) is being issued based on the needs described below. CHF 75,000 has been allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). The Federation does not anticipate further needs. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are needed. This operation will be reported on through the DREF update.

Based on further updates and details from assessment reports, or should the situation deteriorate, the Egyptian Red Crescent will consider enlarging its operation and seeking international support.

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

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All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the Code of Conduct¹ and is committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response² in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for a full description of the national society profile, please access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

The Situation

For the past 15 days, the border crossing point between Egypt and Gaza at Rafah Terminal (southern border of the Gaza Strip) has been predominantly closed; some openings of short duration have occurred. These closures have resulted in a mass of stranded populations on the Egyptian side, waiting for the re-opening of the borders. The average daily number of individuals stranded is approximately 2,500, comprised of: young children (30%), elderly, persons with chronic health conditions and disabled. This affected population is primarily Palestinians returning to Gaza from summer holidays and from medical treatment abroad. Approximately 200 are chronically ill, and 40 have recently undergone surgical procedures in Egypt and are returning home.

¹ Code of Conduct - <http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/>

² Humanitarian Charter - <http://www.sphereproject.org/>

The Egyptian authorities are granting permits to people to leave the border areas; however, more people are arriving daily (200 since 31 July). Tensions are high, and the situation is worsening, further frustrating individuals and families. The number of stranded travellers is not expected to decline as those who could leave and/or have decided to cancel summer visits to Gaza, have already left.

Despite the efforts of the Egyptian Red Crescent Society³ and local authorities, the conditions of Palestinians are worsening; they are suffering from harsh, provisional living conditions. Their moral and psychological status is greatly affected. Their families on the other side of the borders are sharing their worry and anxiety.

The Israeli High Court heard a petition from Israeli physicians seeking an order to open the border. The High Court decided to grant the army thirty days to explain. This implies that this crisis may last for the nearby future.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Action

The Egyptian Red Crescent Disaster Committee is monitoring the situation on a daily basis.

For over fifteen days Egyptian Red Crescent members and volunteers in North Sinai branch have been mobilized, deployed to support the authorities and have been caring for the stranded population through distribution of water bottles, food parcels procured by Egyptian Red Crescent and are working round the clock to alleviate the suffering.

A Palestinian doctor – stranded amongst the Palestinians, and a member of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society – has been helping the Egyptian Red Crescent in responding to the emergency. The Secretary General of Egyptian Red Crescent requested him to liaise between stranded population and the authorities.

On 27 July, at the request of Egyptian Red Crescent, ICRC Cairo accompanied Egyptian Red Crescent representatives and North Sinai Governorates officials to the Rafah border crossing area in order to further assess the situation. Following this visit, the Egyptian Red Crescent, with the support of the Governorates of Sinai, and local communities have been working on providing the minimum humanitarian needs including food parcels, water and tents, fans for the past 10 days. The ICRC has offered assistance in the form of the purchase of 2 large tents, 40 fans, and the cost of food for 5 days. The Ministry of Health has been providing medical care and drugs.

Food Distribution

The Egyptian Red Crescent staff, volunteers and youth continue to distribute daily food rations to persons stranded at the border. The next five days should be secured (USD 2 per day for 2,500 people). The preparation of a food parcel stock is part of the contingency plan (10 days from 7 August 2004).

Shelters

So far, two temporary shelters were erected by the Egyptian Red Crescent. With support from ICRC, the Egyptian Red Crescent will procure additional tents (large tents for 50 people).

Better shelters have been erected by Egyptian Red Crescent. Should the situation continue to worsen with the regular arrival of additional people, the rent of the existing – and possibly additional - shelters will have to be extended (USD 300 per day per shelter).

Water and Sanitation

Additional staff was mobilized to take care of this hygienic and environmental health issues. Safe water is now available by the authorities; the Egyptian Red Crescent is providing chillers. The local authorities have built 8 new toilets/latrines and provided shower facilities. Four additional latrines/lavatories have been established by the local authorities.

³ Egyptian Red Crescent - <http://www.ifrc.org/where/country/check.asp?countryid=61>

Health

Egyptian Health authorities have been responsible for the health care, sanitation and supervision. The Egyptian Red Crescent established another clinic to deliver health care and benefited from the support of some Palestinian physicians and volunteers. The clinic has performed over 1,600 consultations since 18 July, and sees 40-60 persons per day. A new clinic was set up by the authorities.

The medical needs are currently met and handled through donations from Egyptian Ministry of Health (MoH) and defence forces. Therefore, no medical items are requested by Egyptian Red Crescent. All donations, if any shall be channelled through the MoH.

A new born baby was delivered overnight; two other women are expected to deliver shortly. Two cases of abortion were registered so far. Cases are being transported to nearby Rafah hospital. Twenty-six Palestinians were admitted in Rafah hospital for inter-current ailments (none is epidemic). Two elderly persons died from natural causes and were buried in Rafah.

Upon request of the Egyptian Red Crescent, MoH authorities are vaccinating all stranded people against meningitis and cholera. Children are receiving vaccinations in line with their regular vaccination program.

Coordination

The Regional Office for North Africa is closely monitoring the situation with the Egyptian Red Crescent, has organized the release of DREF funds, and is maintaining close contacts with the Federation Palestine Delegation and the Federation Regional Office for Middle East.

ICRC Office in Cairo, in view of the critical conditions prevailing for those blocked in and around the terminal, was very much involved in the operation and decided to support immediately Egyptian Red Crescent with additional relief assistance (two big tents, 40 fans as well as the costs of Food for 5 days).

The President of the Palestine Red Crescent Society is also following closely the situation and has addressed a message to the Egyptian Red Crescent thanking the National Society and the Arich Branch for their efforts to support the affected people.

Needs Assessment

The Egyptian Red Crescent is in the process, thanks to the Federation and ICRC support of procuring the necessary relief items. Needs shall be secured for the next five days. However, due to the volatile context, Egyptian Red Crescent is currently working on a contingency plan. Support is still needed to provide for the needs of 2,500 individuals for 10 days, including shelter and food.

A UN Mission (UNICEF and WFP) visited the Rafah outlet and the Egyptian Red Crescent facilities on 4 August 2004. The situation is worsening. More Palestinians are arriving and numbers are increasing. The assessment report is expected soon. A fact-finding mission was also organized by U.S. Embassy staff.

Conclusion

In spite of all efforts at the diplomatic and humanitarian level, the borders are still closed. There is a need for stronger intervention at the international level to solve this situation.

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeals:

- [North Africa regional programmes Annual Appeal 01.88/2004⁴](http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual04/018804.pdf)
- [Middle East regional programmes Annual Appeal 01.89/2004⁵](http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual04/018904.pdf)

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⁴ North Africa Annual Appeal - http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual04/018804.pdf

⁵ Middle East regional programmes - http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual04/018904.pdf