



EGYPT: PALESTINIANS STRANDED ON THE AL- AREESH AND AL-RAFAH BORDERS

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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 185 countries.

In Brief

Period covered by this update: 20 July to 5 August 2007.

History of this Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF)-funded operation:

- CHF 100,000 allocated from the Federations DREF on 20 July, 2007 to respond to the needs of this operation, or to replenish disaster preparedness stocks distributed to the affected population.
- This operation is expected to be implemented over three months, and will be completed by 18 October, 2007; a DREF Bulletin Final Report (narrative and financial) will be made available three months after the end of the operation (by 18 January 2008).

The International Federation undertakes activities that are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity."

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

- *In Egypt: Egyptian Red Crescent, Prof. M. GABR; telephone: 00.202.26703979, 00.202.2670397, email: erc@egyptianrc.org*
- *In the Regional Representation for North Africa: Anne E. LECLERC, Regional Representative, Tunis, telephone: 00.216.71.862.485, 00.216.71.862.971, email: ae.leclerc@ifrc.org*
- *In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Zone office: Marwan Jilani, Head of Zone, telephone: + 962-6-5627934, email: marwan.jilani@ifrc.org*

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Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (Sphere) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. For longer-term programmes in this or other countries or regions, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for national society profiles, please also access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

Background and current situation

The internal fighting in Gaza which ended with Hamas taking full control of Palestinian Authority institutions, including security, and the ensuing political developments led the European observer team that had been stationed at the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt to withdraw. As a consequence, the border crossing between Gaza and Egypt was closed from 15 June until a political solution was found at the end of July, allowing the Palestinians to gradually return home.

During the closure of the Rafah outlet between Egypt and Gaza region of Palestine, more than 6,000 Palestinians were stranded mainly in the cities of Al Areesh and Rafah in north Sinai close to the Egyptian-Palestinian border.

On 15th July 2007 the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) called for urgent aid for Gaza as fears about a humanitarian crisis mount. The call came during a meeting, in Cairo, between the UNRWA Commissioner General, Karen AbuZayd and the Secretary General of the Arab League, Amr Musa.

Most of the Palestinians were hosted by families or relatives and some, who could afford to, rented apartments waiting for the reopening of the border. During the first month, there was no problem since most Palestinians and their hosts covered the daily necessities of their families. The Egyptian government covered the health care costs for those in need, who were treated for free in governmental hospitals and if necessary referral hospitals nearby.

The situation started to change on 20 July as many of the families grew short of money. The governorate of Al Areesh arranged free lodging for these families in schools and youth clubs both in Al Areesh and Rafah for 1,000 Palestinians. A total of 743 Palestinians moved to these places.



Palestinian men waiting at Rafah border to cross for medication.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action



Egyptian Red Crescent volunteers charging trucks with the relief materials.

An initial assessment was made by the Red Crescent branch of El Areesh. The secretary general of the Egyptian Red Crescent, Professor Gabr, visited El Areesh and Rafah in mid July to monitor the situation and identify the humanitarian needs of the stranded Palestinians. Several meetings were held with the concerned authorities.

Following other assessment missions, the board of the Egyptian Red Crescent adopted an action plan to support the stranded Palestinians along four approaches:

- distributing food parcels sufficient for ten days by the local Red Crescent branches in Rafah and Al Areesh to the families most in need. Data of these families including the

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date of arrival and travel document was recorded;

- trained youth volunteers of the Red Crescent headquarters and north Sinai branch provided psychological support to the stranded families, identified their other needs and tried to satisfy them;
- two Red Crescent nurseries in north Sinai received Palestinian children and provided them with a hot meal;
- youth volunteers helped hospitalized and handicapped Palestinians, providing them with extra necessities.

The Egyptian Red Crescent, in coordination with the local authorities supplied food parcels and hygiene kits for a period of ten days and supported people by providing psychological support.

A special committee composed of representatives from the Egyptian Red Crescent headquarters, from north Sinai branch and from the governorate, including the Secretariat of the Governor and departments of health and solidarity, has been established to assure the distribution of the food parcels.

A team of 35 Egyptian Red Crescent volunteers was deployed in Al Areesh on 20 July to prepare the distribution of the food packages. Some 17 volunteers from the Egyptian Red Crescent were actually present at the food company in Cairo, preparing the food packages. Trucks were hired on a daily basis to transport the packages to Al Areesh.



Composition of the food parcels:

- 1 kilo of sugar
- 2 kilos of rice
- 4 boxes of tea
- 2 bottles of cooking oil
- 1 kilo of butter
- 5 packets of macaroni
- 1 package of detergent package
- 2 kilos of beans
- 1 kilo of oriental sweets
- 1 can of tuna fish
- 3 boxes of processed cheese
- 2 packets of biscuits

The first 1,000 packages arrived in Al Areesh on 22 July, and were distributed efficiently to 1,000 beneficiaries. A further 500 packages were sent on 23 July and distributed to 500 Palestinians in Rafah. Distribution of dried food parcels ran regularly under the supervision of the special committee. Data for each beneficiary was recorded and the travel documents were stamped indicating the date of distribution. Up to 31 July, 3,800 of the stranded Palestinians had received food parcels.

The cost of the food parcels including packaging, transportation and administrative expenses is around USD 88,496. Other expenses such as nurseries, care of the sick, detergents, mattresses and other necessities cost around USD 30,000.

The Egyptian Red Crescent has received donations to cover these expenses from individual national donors and national organizations. International contributions from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) of CHF 100,000 and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of USD 20,000 as well as smaller contributions from other international organizations were also received.

In addition to this assistance, the Egyptian Red Crescent, in close partnership with the UNRWA Cairo office that facilitated getting the relevant authorization for the Egyptian Red Crescent, sent 1,500 tons of food aid including rice, wheat and sugar to the Gaza region. Trucks were hired by the Egyptian Red Crescent and relief materials purchased thanks to a successful local resource mobilization process. The first shipment of 400 tonnes was sent through Karem Shalom outlet, south of Rafah, on 23 and 24 July.



Special committee for the distribution of food.

Some Egyptians, as a humanitarian gesture, volunteered to visit Palestinians receiving free treatment in North Sinai hospitals.

Looking ahead

Since the release of the DREF funds, the regional representation for North Africa of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has closely monitored the situation with the Egyptian Red Crescent and ICRC delegation in Cairo.

Nearly 1,600 Palestinians out of 6,000 stranded in Egypt for weeks have made it back to Gaza since Israel started allowing them passage last week. The borders were temporarily opened during the first week of August allowing return of 629 Palestinians who were already registered with the Palestinian embassy in Cairo.

The Egyptian Red Crescent foresees that the situation will remain volatile and will continue to closely support the situation.

The regional representation for North Africa, the ICRC delegation in Cairo and the Egyptian Red Crescent are looking ahead to set up a joint preparedness programme in order to reinforce the capacity of the Egyptian Red Crescent in the field of disaster management to increase its operational response capacity and preparedness at times of crisis.

Interim financial report

Description	Budget	Expenditures	Variance
5000 food parcels	86 100	75 257	10,843
200 daily meals for children	4,317		4,317
5000 packaging boxes		4 569	(4,569)
Incentives for volunteers	1,000		1,000
Administrative costs	2,083	3 705	(1,622)
Transport		7 150	(7,150)
PSR	6,500	6,500	0
TOTAL	100,000	97,181	2,819

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