

**Gaza Conflict Q&A**  
**Hervé Caiveau**  
**TA Jerusalem**  
**Jerusalem 12/1/09**

**The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip in the occupied Palestinian Territory has deteriorated dramatically since the outbreak of fighting on 27<sup>th</sup> December. The ongoing bombardment by Israeli forces of the Gaza Strip and the continued shelling of Israel by Hamas has drastically reduced the access humanitarian organisations have to the people in the Gaza Strip who have been affected by the crisis.**

**Hervé Caiveau is the Head of the Jerusalem office of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) and has been following the latest developments.**

**Question: What is the current humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip?**

**Hervé Caiveau:** The humanitarian situation, which was fragile before the fighting began at the end of December, is changing for the worse on a daily basis as a result of the ongoing military action. The humanitarian crisis that is developing is exaggerated by the unique dilemma that people in the Gaza Strip face, namely that they are fenced in. Unlike in other conflicts around the world, where people are able to flee the fighting, Gazans have to remain where they are; they are unable to find any safe havens and have to find shelter from the bombings as best they can.

**Question: What is known about the provision of basic services?**

**HC:** Around a million people out of Gaza's total population of 1.5 million depend on food aid, the supply of which has been severely disrupted. It is becoming increasingly difficult to supply wheat flour for the baking of bread, the staple food in the Gaza Strip, and now fewer than ten of the territory's 47 bakeries are operating, creating a shortage of bread and driving up prices beyond the reach of many people.

Health services are totally overwhelmed. The authorities in the Gaza Strip have naturally focused on emergency health care, caring for the more than 3500 people who have been injured during the conflict. Medical supplies are running very low and health staff are being overwhelmed. Of course, normal primary health services are barely functioning as all resources are being targeted on caring for the wounded.

We estimate that approximately half of Gaza's population is without water and around two-thirds without electricity.

**Question: What can ECHO do to help the people of Gaza?**

**HC:** It is crucial that both parties in the conflict observe the ceasefire that was passed by the United Nations Security Council resolution 1860. It is very difficult to provide enough humanitarian aid in such an enclosed area while fighting is continuing. It is only once hostilities have stopped that the organisations ECHO is funding - UN agencies and the International Red Cross (ICRC) as well as NGO partners can make a proper assessment of the humanitarian needs. At the moment, access is very limited and a proper assessment is not possible.

**Question: The Israeli authorities have called a daily three hour long ceasefire to allow in humanitarian supplies. What difference has that made?**

**HC:** Any opportunity to provide humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip is welcome, but a three hour window is simply not long enough to deal with the massive humanitarian crisis that is developing there. A longer daily ceasefire, towards total cessation of hostilities is needed to ensure the people of Gaza receive the right amount of assistance.

**Question: Is more money needed to support the humanitarian aid effort?**

**HC:** In 2008, the European Commission provided €73 million in aid to the Palestinian Territories making it one of the world's largest donors of humanitarian aid; around 56% was spent on relief efforts in the Gaza Strip. €3 million in extra emergency funding was allocated in the first week of January to provide Gaza's population with food and items like blankets, soap and cooking equipment, as well as repairing emergency shelters and the provision of further medical support. Further substantial EU relief funds for the Palestinians will be announced very soon. But the main issue at the moment is not so much a lack of money. The imperative for aid agencies is to gain access to the needy people in in the Gaza Strip and to ensure the security of the aid workers providing assistance.

**Question: Why can't Europe do more to help find a political solution to this conflict?**

**HC:** European leaders are engaging with Israel and other countries in the region. However this is a conflict that has lasted for six decades so there is unlikely to be a quick-fix solution. As a humanitarian aid organisation, ECHO's work is focused on providing aid to the people who need it whatever their political or religious affiliations. ECHO has appointed a liaison officer in Tel Aviv who is meeting the Israeli authorities on a daily basis to coordinate the provision of humanitarian aid.