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OCHA: Nablus Situation Report

by Electronic Intifada (reposted)
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28 February 2007: At approximately 02:30 on 28 February, a large force of IDF soldiers and Israeli Border Police re-entered Nablus. This latest incursion marks the continuation of Operation "Hot Winter", the largest military incursion in three years in Nablus city.

Since re-entering Nablus in the early hours of this morning, as was the case with the first incursion, the IDF has placed the Old City and its surroundings under curfew. The IDF has again taken over the facilities of local television and radio stations to announce the names of seven wanted Palestinians they are specifically seeking.

To date approximately 40 arrests were reported over the course of the operation. One Palestinian fatality and 12 injuries were reported; two IDF injuries were also reported. The operation began on 23 February with the intention, according to the IDF, of arresting wanted Palestinians.

The operation intensified during the early hours of 25 February when approximately 20,000 people were placed under curfew in the densely populated Old City area and its immediate surroundings. An intensive house-to-house search and arrest campaign followed and a number of houses were occupied by the IDF and their families confined to single rooms. At approximately 22:00 on 26 February the IDF withdrew, ending the first phase of the operation.

Protection of civilians

A 42 year-old Palestinian man was killed in the Al Yasmina area of the Old City on 26 February. His 24 year-old son was injured in the same incident. Another 11 injuries were reported during the course of the operation including four injuries this morning.

Since re-entering Nablus on 28 February, house-to-house searches are again underway and local sources report that family members of two wanted Palestinians have been taken into custody. A number of houses have again been occupied by the military and family members evacuated.

Health

Health centres within the Old City are closed but emergency committee health teams are attempting to circulate to address immediate needs.

Throughout the course of the operation, three local hospitals – Al Wattani, Rafidiya, Al Itihad – have been surrounded by the IDF who are checking all those entering and leaving. An attempt on 26 February by local and international volunteers to open the municipality primary health care centre in the Old City was blocked by the IDF. A shortage of insulin and medicines for psychological ailments was identified by the local emergency committee. The emergency health committee is monitoring the situation during the current operation and the Palestinian Minister of Health (MoH) has announced that all residents of the Old City will be treated as insured,

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irrespective of their status, for the duration of the operation.

Infrastructure

Electricity was cut briefly during the initial incursion but restored by the municipality and electricity and water services functioned throughout. Three homes were reported damaged, and one completely demolished. One coffeehouse was burnt in addition to a house in Makhfiya area outside the Old City during an IDF operation on 26 February. According to the IDF, damage was caused when the army detonated explosives found in the buildings. Many buildings in the Old City also suffered minor structural damage.

Education

A school within the Old City has been turned into a interrogation and detention centre by the IDF. All schools in Nablus, as well as An Najah and Al Quds Open University, were closed because of the difficulty teachers and students faced in reaching their facilities during the initial phase of the operation. On 28 February the two Nablus universities remain closed and most Nablus schools appear to be affected. UNRWA services in the three nearby refugee camps have operated below full capacity.

Food

On 26 February some 500 kilos of bread and milk were supplied by local donations and distributed to parts of the Old City. The food situation was not considered urgent according to the local emergency committee as the operation appeared to be over on 26 February. If the present operation continues WFP is ready to distribute ready-to eat food (canned meat, oil, chickpeas, sugar and bread) to 7,000 people for one week if the need arises.

Coordination and Access

An emergency committee has been set up under the auspices of the Nablus municipality, with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society acting as focal point. Emergency phone numbers for use in the Nablus area only have been established, including a 'psycho-social hotline' manned by the Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA).

Immediate needs identified were baby milk, basic medicines and diapers. On 26 February, distribution was carried out by local volunteers from the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees and international solidarity volunteers. The committee also prepared a list of after-curfew assistance, in particular blankets and kitchen kits for those affected by searches and demolitions, which was distributed to local agencies on 27 February.

Since 26 February, OCHA has convened daily meetings with humanitarian agencies on the ground including UNRWA, WFP, UNICEF, ICRC, MSF, MDM and UNDSS in Nablus. The first meeting was also attended by the Mayor of Nablus. Daily meetings will continue to convene for the duration of the operation.

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