

WHO says 200,000 Palestinians in need of health aid

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WHO warns of "staggering health needs" across occupied Palestinian territory after recent aggression

Geneva, June 3 (RHC)-- Officials from the United Nations and Red Cross have visited the besieged Gaza Strip to review the destruction from Israel's 11-day bombardment, including damage to homes, schools, hospitals and other critical infrastructure.

Israeli attacks on the enclave that began on May 10 killed at least 254 Palestinians, including 66 children, according to health authorities in Gaza. At least 12 people, including two children, were killed in Israel by

rocket attacks carried out by armed groups based in Gaza.

In a statement on Wednesday, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned of “staggering health needs” across the occupied Palestinian territory, saying the conflict sparked further population displacement and exacerbated a prolonged humanitarian crisis. “Over 77,000 people were internally displaced and around 30 health facilities have been damaged,” it said.

The WHO said it was “scaling up its response to provide health aid for almost 200,000 people in need”, across the occupied Palestinian territory, including the occupied West Bank. “The situation is volatile. WHO remains concerned ... and calls for unhindered access for humanitarian and development-related essential supplies and staff into Gaza and referral of patients out of Gaza whenever needed,” WHO’s Rik Peepkorn said.

Meanwhile, the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) appealed for more than \$16m to help the people in Gaza. “Fear, anxiety and stress were the key words I heard repeatedly today,” ICRC head Robert Mardini told Al Jazeera after touring Gaza areas devastated by the Israeli bombardment.

“Even if the escalation was shorter than in previous situations, it will take years to rebuild what was damaged only in 11 days,” he said, calling for “a meaningful political solution to [end] this longstanding conflict.” “In the meantime, we need to really step up our support in order to beef up the humanitarian response in the Gaza Strip in the short term.”

Meanwhile, the Gaza director of the UN agency that deals with Palestinian refugees has been called in for consultation with his bosses after angering Palestinians through saying he did not dispute Israel’s assertion that its air strikes were “precise.”

The comments by Matthias Schmale in an interview with Israel’s N12 television on May 22 have prompted Palestinian protests. The recent Israeli attacks on Gaza destroyed 1,800 residential units and partially destroyed at least another 14,300, forcing tens of thousands of Palestinians to take shelter in UN-run schools.

The bombing also struck some 74 public buildings, including local municipalities, according to figures released by Gaza’s information ministry. Israeli officials and Hamas officials have recently held separate permanent truce talks with Egyptian officials.

Israel enforced a land and sea blockade on Gaza since Hamas seized control in 2007 of the impoverished and densely populated territory that is home to about two million Palestinians. Egypt’s heavily secured Rafah crossing is Gaza’s only passage to the outside world not controlled by Israel.

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