

Rising up to the Challenge

A month has passed since the war on Gaza, with thousands injured and over 1300 Palestinians killed. The sheer magnitude of destruction presented many challenges for the UN family and partners on the ground. For Operations at UNDP/PAPP, the response was immediate. The result was the establishment of the logistical backbone for the entire operation to facilitate UNDP's work in and out of Gaza.

UNDP/PAPP's efforts were directed first and foremost to keep its staff safe and provide practical support when and where possible. A pro-action mechanism was set up based on the Business Continuity Plan (BCP) and the operations team worked with remarkable speed and effectiveness, with major efforts taking place in the fields of Finance, HR, Procurement, Logistics, and Security.

UNDP Gaza security personnel together with UNDSS and with the help of UNRWA, started to pick up staff and their families from locations that had become too dangerous and bring them to the UNDP office by armored vehicles. The office was used as a safe heaven for around 70 people a day and sometimes overnight. People would leave during calm periods, but would seek a safer place again when the fighting would flare up. At one point, security personnel managed to take out a family from their house after they had been surrounded for a couple of days by Israeli military troops, and thus fierce fighting.

For the staff, cash was secured at hand for procurement expenses as well as to pay Gaza staff advance salaries for January and February after only two days into the war. Essential items such as blankets, batteries, solar phones and others were also procured.

For the person at the helm of this success story, Deputy Special Representative for Operations, Mr. Khaled Shahwan asserts, "The safety of our staff is of primary concern. We know that nothing can take away the grief of those affected by the war, but we also know that UNDP/PAPP has a history of rising to meet this challenge".

After the ceasefire has come into effect on January 18, 2009, UNDP – Gaza started working to assist the staff immediately, such as providing for stress counselors, trying to provide cash assistance and house rehabilitation for those houses and properties, which have sustained damage due to the hostilities.

In Jerusalem, UNDP/PAPP has been taking the lead in providing all logistical support for the Early Recovery Team, whether through the arrangement of visas and transportation, or the creation of a fully functioning operations room in its Ramallah building.

As any development agency would attest, a central but often unsung pillar to the establishment of an effective and viable development shop is its support staff in the operations department. Nowhere is this more evident than in the UNDP Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (PAPP). The cooperation between the operations and programme teams ensured a common approach to best assist UNDP Gaza staff.