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# Reham Shaheen, stranded in Jordan and helping civilians in Gaza

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Reham Shaheen, rehabilitation specialist for HI in the Gaza Strip. | © D. De Munter / HI

HI rehabilitation specialist Reham Shaheen lives in the Gaza Strip. She talks to us about the situation and the threat posed to civilians by recent events.

A few days before the Hamas attacks and the Israeli government's reprisals, Reham Shaheen, a rehabilitation specialist for HI in the Gaza Strip, left the Occupied Palestinian Territories on an advocacy and communications tour to Belgium and Luxembourg. More than 3,000 km from her husband and three children, she followed the escalation of the conflict. Now stranded in Jordan, with the borders closed, she recounts daily life in Gaza and the mounting difficulties faced by civilians and humanitarian workers.

Hamas attacks and Israeli reprisals are having a devastating impact on civilians. Some 1,400 people have already lost their lives in Israel according to the Israeli authorities, and more than 4,600 people in Gaza according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health. Of the 1.4 million people displaced within the Gaza Strip, around 580,000 are housed in 150 UNRWA Designated Emergency Shelters (DES).

Present in Palestine since 1996, HI is responding to the emergency. Reham Shaheen is part of our team in Gaza.

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With each passing day, Reham Shaheen becomes increasingly anxious about her three children, aged 12, 10 and 4, and her 39-year-old husband. On 13 October, her family fled their home in northern Gaza after receiving a text message saying that their neighbour's house was about to be targeted. A few minutes later, it was destroyed. They left to live with Reham's father-in-law on the outskirts of the city, taking only a few clothes with them. Today, there are eight families living there, a total of 35 people, without electricity or water. Fortunately, they have a small generator that allows them to recharge their mobile phones and keep Reham informed of the situation.

Reham knows that when she returns, she won't recognise her town - the whole area has been destroyed! Shops, houses... everything.

*"My family is alive, but not well. In this situation, no one can be well. I'm worried about my children's psychological state, not to mention the possibility of them being injured or killed."*

Her mother, aged 67, is diabetic. Without electricity, there is no fridge to keep her insulin at the right temperature. Nor can she attend her regular hospital appointments. She left her home and tried to seek refuge with one of Reham's colleagues. This proved too dangerous and she moved into a shelter in a school. But food, water, blankets and mattresses were in short supply. So, she had to move again and now lives in a rented house with her sister, Reham's aunt.

What worries Reham the most? The recurring traumas and the intense escalation of the conflict, which will have long-term consequences for the population.

## Helping civilians from Jordan

After spending 10 days between Belgium and Luxembourg, Reham is now at HI's office in Jordan. While she waits to return home, she is organising humanitarian aid from a distance, helping her colleagues to implement the emergency preparedness plan. HI has five logistics warehouses with emergency stocks in Gaza, and a team of volunteers made up of nurses, physiotherapists and psychologists, all mobilised to help civilians.

For Reham Shaheen, more than water and food, the most desperate need is for a ceasefire, the protection of civilians and urgent and safe humanitarian access, as required by international law.

HI is calling on all parties to the conflict to stop the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas such as Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. HI is also supporting #CeasefireNow, an open call for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and Israel to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and further loss of innocent lives and ensure humanitarian aid can be delivered rapidly and safely.





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