

Statement by the Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Mr Muhannad Hadi on the security incident affecting a UN convoy at Al Rashid Checkpoint in Gaza

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Over the past week, the polio vaccination campaign in Gaza has provided evidence of what the UN and its humanitarian partners can achieve when afforded safe and secure access by the parties to the conflict.

However, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations face continuous obstruction and insecurity in their efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the devastated population in Gaza.

Yesterday, a team of twelve UN staff members, whose movement was fully coordinated with Israeli Defense Forces, and whose details were shared with them in advance, were stopped on its way to North Gaza to support the third phase of the Gaza Strip-wide polio vaccination campaign.

While at the checkpoint the team was informed that the IDF wanted to hold two of the UN staff members in the convoy for further questioning. The situation escalated quickly, with soldiers pointing their weapons directly towards the convoy personnel. Live shots were fired, and tanks and bulldozers approached, engaged with, and damaged UN vehicles, endangering the lives of UN staff inside the vehicles.

The convoy remained held at gunpoint while senior level UN officials engaged with the Israeli Authorities to de-escalate the situation. The two staff were eventually questioned, one by one, and then released. After seven and a half hours at the checkpoint, the convoy returned to base without being able to fulfill its humanitarian mission to support the polio campaign.

This incident highlights the ongoing dangers and obstacles humanitarian personnel face in Gaza. Despite daily coordination of humanitarian movements with the Israeli Defense Forces, our staff and assets were not provided with sufficient protection, hindering our work. Under international humanitarian law, such protection is mandatory.