



CARE West Bank and Gaza ...with the NGO community in the Strip

Gaza...a Volatile Strip

April, 2010

“GANSO is the best available system for security warnings and updates for NGOs and INGOs operating in Gaza, and an important source of information for security trends in the Strip”

Shane Middleton

EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Humanitarian Aid

Shane Middleton, Program Manager of the non governmental organisation CHF, knows first hand the dangers NGO staff face in the Gaza Strip. “We were leaving Gaza City on our way to the Middle Area for a site visit when a radio warning from the UN Department for Security and Safety (UNDSS) on the GANSO radio channel informed us about ongoing Israeli military fire towards a group of protestors east of Al Maghazi refugee camp”, Shane recounts. However, the UNDSS radio report did not mention the location or specifics of the incident. CHF’s first

reaction was to contact the GANSO Radio Room. “Within two minutes, GANSO not only provided us with accurate details regarding the incident and conditions in the area but sent an SMS alert to all organisations warning them to avoid the “buffer zone” where the incident was taking place”. Acting on GANSO’s information, the CHF team was able to adjust their movement and avoid the area.

CHF is just one of approximately 850 local and international organisations currently operating in the Gaza Strip. Either distributing food and clothes to

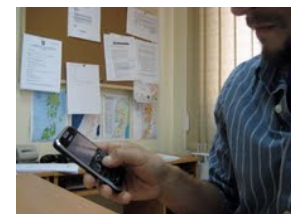
vulnerable families, or providing health services to un-served communities, NGO staff must move throughout the volatile coastal strip to fulfil their vital humanitarian mission. In light of the increasing instability in Gaza, and recognising the urgency of continued aid delivery, since November 2007 CARE has dedicated itself to improving the safety of the humanitarian organisations through implementing the “Gaza NGO Safety” project – Phase III (GANSO). The project is made possible thanks to funding from the European Commission Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO).

The SMS Messaging Service

GANSO completes its third phase in May 2010. During the last year, the project has been fundamental in improving the safety and security of NGOs working throughout the Gaza Strip. To this end, GANSO provides a range of core services such as Incident Alerts by SMS, email, and VHF radio; Bi-Weekly Safety Reports; and Monthly Safety Briefings together with the supply of security equipment and training.

Speaking to those on the ground, the SMS service proved to be an invaluable information tool for improving safety awareness. According to Geraldine Kelly, Regional Desk Officer of the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), “The SMS messaging service provided by GANSO is the most helpful and informative service. These alerts allow us to rapidly receive information on important security related incidents —

from Israeli flyovers and sonic booms, to border clashes between Israeli



Field staff receive real-time access to updates and developments through GANSO SMS security alert regardless of their location

military forces and Palestinian operatives”.

The main advantage of the SMS service is its ability to provide NGO staff real-time access to up-

dates and developments no matter their location. As Ken Dunn, Technical Field Manager at MAG explained, “The SMS messaging service is essential when our staff are deployed in the field since they

don’t have to rely on the operation manager. Now they receive information almost in real time, helping them to avoid hazardous area and incidents”.

Safety is a Two-Way Street

The GANSO project has not only proved successful in providing critical safety- and security-related information to humanitarian organisations working in the Gaza Strip, but also created a dynamic platform for reciprocal information sharing between member organisations and GANSO.

The GANSO call centre allows members to relay critical information to GANSO and other NGOs, fundamental to improving the strength and effectiveness of the project. It has also given member organizations a sense of ownership

and a stake in ensuring each other’s safety and security. Recently, CHF staff were leaving North Gaza when they observed numerous de-facto police searching the road and trash bins in the vicinity of the home of de-facto Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. As Shane Middleton recalls, “This type of event is typically a sign that an IED (improvised explosive device) had been placed along the road. We turned back and informed GANSO. After verifying the information, they quickly sent out a SMS message warning members to stay away from the

beach road”.



Project staff in GANSO's call centre sending security updates to registered organizations delivering aid throughout the Gaza Strip



Gaza Strip...a Nexus of Humanitarian Needs

Situations like those experienced by CHF and MAG are not unique in the Gaza Strip. An unstable and violent environment, with threats emanating from both Israeli military activities and Palestinian inter-factional and interclan strife, not only poses a threat to the delivery of lifesaving assistance to the Gazan people. Three years of the Israeli blockade, a decimated local economy, high unemployment, and poverty have rendered Gaza a nexus of humanitarian needs. With 71% of the total population dependant on external assistance, the work carried out by humanitarian organi-

sations is essential for the survival of the Palestinians in Gaza. CARE West Bank and Gaza through the GANSO project, provides emergency safety information and analysis as well as safety training to the staff of 119 non-profit organizations, which helps to build the requisite security capacities to ensure the NGO community in the Strip is able to carry out its humanitarian mandate.

GANSO
Gaza NGO Safety Office

For more information about the project contact Thom Kaye at tkaye@carewbg.org

Or please visit GANSO project website: www.gaza-nso.org/