

# Urgent call to prioritise communication in Gaza

18 December 2023



**Gaza has experienced five near-total communications blackouts since since 7 October 2023.<sup>1</sup> People cannot access critical information. They cannot reach loved ones. Aid agencies cannot contact staff or coordinate assistance. Media coverage and documentation is further restricted.**

## Communication is severely restricted in Gaza

Lack of fuel, destruction and damage to telecommunications infrastructure, frequent communications blackouts and jamming of phone networks have denied people access to vital information and hampered limited humanitarian operations.<sup>2</sup> Across contexts and crises, people prioritise information and being able to communicate as much as cash, food, water, medicine or shelter.<sup>3</sup> As fighting intensifies in southern Gaza, people are trying to stay safe and contact loved ones.<sup>4</sup>

## Disinformation, rumours and hate speech have festered

Fake images and videos are flooding social media feeds and news outlets,<sup>5</sup> polluting the information environment, undermining safe decision-making, and inciting violence, discrimination and fear. This has overwhelmed content verification teams, fact-checkers and journalists, making assessing humanitarian needs harder.<sup>6</sup> Humanitarian information and communication services are running down emergency reserves, struggling to keep pace and often lack the skills to navigate these dynamics.

## Trusted information sources and independent media are shrinking

Since 7 October, 64 journalists have been killed in Gaza – more than in any other conflict in the last 30 years.<sup>7</sup> Journalists face incredibly high risk, with many being targeted, killed, detained or threatened. Reliable information shared from Gaza internationally is allegedly ‘shadow-banned’<sup>8</sup> by digital platforms, and often leads to smear campaigns against individuals and organisations, putting those advocating for Gazans at risk.<sup>9</sup> The safety and security of journalists and independent media is paramount to safeguarding freedom of expression and access to trusted information.

## The cost of ignoring this is high

Warnings of attacks and evacuation orders are often issued through digital channels, which are inaccessible due to the lack of connectivity.<sup>10</sup> Harmful accusations discrediting humanitarian actors have escalated,<sup>11</sup> leading to people turning on aid workers and breaking into UN warehouses.<sup>12</sup> Failure to re-establish communication and to manage people's expectations of external assistance will continue to erode civil order, further challenging operations and physical access for aid convoys.<sup>13</sup>

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## Let Gazans speak, connect with one another and make informed decisions

- 1. Ensure resources are allocated for communication services to restore access to life-saving information now.**
  - a.** Allocate fuel and electricity for telecommunications services and advocate to enable the import of essential equipment, including radio broadcast equipment.
  - b.** Plan funding for aid mechanisms to better listen to Gazans, to respond to their needs and course correct very rapidly. Prioritise hearing views from children, carers, women and elders.
  - c.** Prioritise data on information and communications systems, preferences and access to enable appropriate response.
- 2. Include information and telecommunications in humanitarian access negotiations.** Ensure inclusion of safe corridors for engineers to repair damaged networks, and secure guarantees against interference with humanitarian telecommunications, whether physical or cyber interception.
- 3. Prioritise effective community engagement to counter harmful narratives and repair trust.** Build up existing local resources, cultural practices and trusted local influencers. Analogue, real-world dialogue can contribute as an antidote to damaging online narratives. Aid actors, if supported, can skill up and coordinate to identify, track and analyse evolving harmful narratives and reduce consequences.
- 4. Protect and support journalists and independent media.** Guaranteed safety and freedom of expression for journalists in Gaza are non-negotiable and fundamental to peacebuilding in the region. Ensuring that journalists are protected and provided with support to continue their work is of critical importance.

This is a CDAC Network call for action. CDAC Network consists of 38 humanitarian, media development, communication and technology agencies. CDAC hosted four emergency Community of Practice calls on Gaza on 18 and 25 October, 23 November and 13 December; these were attended by more than 50 participants. This call for action was developed based on the priorities raised by participants from across the Network and informed by the previous [CDAC briefing on the status of communication and information in Gaza](#).

We welcome feedback or questions anytime: please contact us at [info@cdacnetwork.org](mailto:info@cdacnetwork.org).

- 1 New York Times (2023) [Gaza communications have been nearly blacked out for two days](#), 16 December.
- 2 ETC (2023) [Palestine – conflict ETC situation report #3 \(reporting period: 08/11/2023 to 14/11/2023\)](#) .
- 3 World Humanitarian Summit (2016) [Community consultations on humanitarian aid: overall findings – world](#); CDAC Network (2022) [Common advocacy statements](#).
- 4 Access Now (2023) [Palestine unplugged: how Israel disrupts Gaza’s internet](#).
- 5 UN News (2023) [Explainer: fighting for facts amid crisis in Israel and Gaza](#), 27 October.
- 6 Access Now (2023) [Gaza’s last link is gone: civil society urges immediate reversal of total communications blackout now shrouding human rights harms](#), 27 October; Politico (2023) [Israel floods social media to shape opinion around the war](#), 17 October; Reuters (2023) [Disinformation surge threatens to fuel Israel-Hamas conflict](#), 18 October.
- 7 CPJ (2023) [Journalist casualties in the Israel-Gaza war](#), 13 December.
- 8 Shadow banning effectively silences users on social media by blocking them or making content invisible to other users.
- 9 Access Now (2023) [Civil society calls for physical and digital ceasefire in Gaza](#); IMS (2023) [Tech companies must respect Palestinian digital rights](#), 16 October; [The silencing of Gaza](#), 27 November.
- 10 OCHA (2023) [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: flash update #58](#).
- 11 UN News (2023) [Explainer: fighting for facts amid crisis in Israel and Gaza](#), 27 October.
- 12 UN News (2023) [Thousands in Gaza storm UN warehouses; a sign of desperation after weeks-long ‘siege’](#), 29 October.
- 13 UNRWA (2023) [Remarks by UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini to the United Nations General Assembly Fourth Committee](#), 3 November.



CDAC is a network of more than 35 of the largest humanitarian, media development and social innovation actors – including UN agencies, RCRC, NGOs, media and communications actors – working together to shift the dial on humanitarian and development decision-making – moving from global to local.

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### CDAC Network

Sayer Vincent–Invicta House  
108–114 Golden Lane  
London EC1V 8BR  
United Kingdom

-  [cdacnetwork.org](https://cdacnetwork.org)
-  [@CDACN](https://twitter.com/CDACN)
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**Suggested citation:** CDAC Network (2023) ‘Urgent call to prioritise communication in Gaza’ ([www.cdacnetwork.org/policy-briefs/urgent-call-to-prioritise-communication-in-gaza](https://www.cdacnetwork.org/policy-briefs/urgent-call-to-prioritise-communication-in-gaza)).

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