Gaza floods as Caritas warns tents are not safe, dignified long-term shelter

Hundreds of thousands of displaced people face heightened flood risk as winter conditions expose the inadequacy of makeshift shelter across Gaza

Heavy rain and flooding are worsening already critical living conditions for displaced families in Gaza, flooding tents, damaging belongings and affecting health facilities and humanitarian workers who are themselves living in temporary shelters.

The latest UN humanitarian reporting estimates nearly one million displaced people are living in sites at risk of flooding, while more than 65 per cent of displaced households surveyed were living in tents or makeshift shelters.

Caritas Jerusalem's Gaza Operations Manager, Ouda Al-Jelda, said recent rainfall had affected both displaced communities and Caritas operations.

"The recent rainfall has made things even harder, especially for people living in tents and shelters. Caritas Jerusalem in Gaza has also been affected by the rain and flooding. Unfortunately some of our health centres in Gaza have sustained minor damage. Some medicines in our warehouses were partially damaged."

Among those affected are Caritas Jerusalem staff, who continue reporting to work to provide essential healthcare while their own families endure displacement and increasingly harsh conditions.

"What is especially heartbreaking is that it is not only our health centres that have been affected. Some of our staff members also live in tents, and they have suffered greatly from the recent rainfall. Their tents and the belongings of their families have also been completely flooded. Their clothes, equipment and other belongings were soaked with water," Ouda Al-Jelda said.

"Imagine our staff members going to work every morning to serve people and provide services to the community while also facing these difficult conditions and trying to live with dignity with only the bare necessities."

The flooding comes on top of an extraordinary personal toll already being carried by Caritas Jerusalem's local healthcare workers. A recent staff survey found workers had been displaced an average of almost six times since the outbreak of the conflict. More than 70 per cent reported their homes had been partially damaged and over a quarter said their homes had been completely destroyed.

Sally Thomas, Humanitarian Manager at Caritas Australia, said tents could provide temporary emergency shelter but were not a safe, dignified or sustainable home for families enduring prolonged displacement.

"A tent may provide emergency shelter, but it is not a safe, dignified or sustainable place for a family to live long-term. It cannot provide the protection children and families need from heavy rain, flooding and cold."

"People in Gaza have already endured repeated displacement, loss and immense uncertainty. They need access to safe and adequate shelter where they can live with dignity, not another winter trying to protect their children and belongings from the elements."

Ouda Al-Jelda said the needs of displaced staff and families were fundamental.

"Unfortunately, they are living in tents. Neither they nor their children are protected from the rain and cold. They are not asking for luxury, they are simply asking for places that can protect them and their children from the rain and cold."

To support Caritas Australia's Gaza Crisis Appeal, visit www.caritas.org.au/gaza or call 1800 024 413 toll free.

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Media contact: Tara Harvey 0484 002 021 tara.harvey@caritas.org.au or caritasmedia@caritas.org.au