

Joint Statement

30 International Aid Agencies: "We must not fail in Gaza."

(26 February 2015) - Six months have passed since a ceasefire on 26 August 2014 ended over seven weeks of fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip. As UN agencies and international NGOs operating in Gaza, we are alarmed by the limited progress in rebuilding the lives of those affected and tackling the root causes of the conflict.

The Israeli-imposed blockade continues, the political process, along with the economy, are paralyzed, and living conditions have worsened.

Reconstruction and repairs to the tens of thousands of homes, hospitals, and schools damaged or destroyed in the fighting has been woefully slow. Sporadic rocket fire from Palestinian armed groups has resumed. Overall, the lack of progress has deepened levels of desperation and frustration among the population, more than two thirds of whom are Palestine refugees.

Living conditions in Gaza were already dire before the latest round of fighting. Most residents were unable to meet their food requirements and over seven years of blockade had severely compromised access to basic services, including to health, water and sanitation.

But since July, the situation has deteriorated dramatically. Approximately 100,000 Palestinians remain displaced this winter, living in dire conditions in schools and makeshift shelters not designed for long-term stay. Scheduled power cuts persist for up to 18 hours a day. The continued non-payment of the salaries of public sector employees and the lack of progress in the national unity government further increases tensions. With severe restrictions on movement, most of the 1.8 million residents are trapped in the coastal enclave, with no hope for the future.

Bearing the brunt of this suffering are the most vulnerable, including the elderly, persons with disabilities, women and nearly one million children, who have experienced unimaginable suffering in three major conflicts in six short years. Children lack access to quality education, with over 400,000 of them in need of immediate psychosocial support.

Within this context, the international community is not providing Gaza with adequate assistance. Little of the US\$ 5.4 billion pledged in Cairo has reached Gaza. Cash assistance to families who lost everything has been suspended and other crucial aid is unavailable due to lack of funds. A return to hostilities is inevitable if progress is not made and the root causes of conflict are not addressed.

Israel, as the occupying power, is the main duty bearer and must comply with its obligations under international law. In particular, it must fully lift the blockade, within the framework of UN Security Council Resolution 1860 (2009). The fragile ceasefire must be reinforced, and the parties must resume negotiations to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian issue. All parties must respect international law and those responsible for violations must be brought to justice. Accountability and adherence to international humanitarian law and international human rights law are essential prerequisites for any lasting peace. Also imperative, Egypt needs to open the Rafah Crossing, most urgently for humanitarian cases, and donor pledges must be translated into disbursements.

We must not fail in Gaza. We must realize the vision of making Gaza a livable place and a cornerstone of peace and security for all in the region.

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http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/30_aid_agencies_joint_statement_26_feb_2014_eng.pdf

1. ActionAid
2. Alianza por la Solidaridad
3. DanChurchAid
4. Diakonia
5. Handicap International
6. Helpage International
7. Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP)
8. Médecins du Monde
9. medico international
10. Mennonite Central Committee
11. Movement for Peace - MPDL
12. Norwegian Church Aid
13. Norwegian People's Aid
14. Norwegian Refugee Council
15. Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator and UN Resident Coordinator
16. Oxfam
17. Premiere Urgence - Aide Médicale Internationale
18. Rebuilding Alliance
19. Save the Children International
20. Secours Islamique France (SIF)
21. Terre des Hommes Foundation
22. The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
23. The Swedish Organisation for Individual Relief
24. UN OCHA oPt
25. UN OHCHR
26. UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)
27. UN Women
28. World Food Programme
29. World Health Organization
30. World Vision Jerusalem - West Bank Gaza