

News Release

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WFP URGES RESTRAINT AFTER GAZA WAREHOUSE DESTRUCTION

JERUSALEM – In response to the weekend demolition of a UN World Food Programme warehouse by the Israeli Defence Forces, WFP is urging the Israeli government to observe humanitarian principles and compensate the agency for its losses.

537 metric tonnes of food aid was being stored in a warehouse in the town of Jaballia in the northern part of the Gaza Strip which was targeted in a military incursion the night of November 30.

"The fact that WFP was not permitted to remove the food is worrisome," said Jean-Luc Siblot, WFP country director. "The food, which was housed on the ground floor of a three-storey building and clearly marked as WFP property, mainly comprised donations from the European Commission and Sweden and was to be distributed by the Ministry of Social Affairs to some 41,300 destitute people affected by the ongoing humanitarian crises in the Gaza Strip."

The total value of the loss is estimated at US \$271,000.

At approximately 22:50, the Israeli Defense Force surrounded the area and six tanks were parked in front of the building. After requesting residents to evacuate their homes, IDF soldiers entered the building and conducted a search of the premises with dogs.

Despite the fact that the storage area was well marked as a WFP warehouse, with a large WFP flag and 3 WFP stickers on the doors, the soldiers proceeded to destroy the doors of the warehouse using tanks. The owner of the building witnessed dynamite sticks being placed in various parts of the building and at approximately midnight, several blasts were heard, followed by a large explosion from a projectile dropped from a helicopter. The building collapsed and everything left in it, including 413 metric tonnes of wheat flour, 107 metric tonnes of rice and 17 metric tonnes of vegetable oil, was destroyed.

"WFP should have been permitted to remove the food. This act has been carried out against basic humanitarian principles," Siblot said. "WFP is asking the Government of Israel to conduct a thorough investigation of the incident and take full responsibility for the losses incurred by the agency."

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WFP is the world's largest humanitarian agency. In 2001, WFP fed more than 77 million people in 82 countries including most of the world's refugees and internally displaced people.

WFP Global School Feeding Campaign -- As the largest provider of nutritious meals to poor school children, WFP has launched a global campaign aimed at ensuring the world's 300 million undernourished children are educated.

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