



Press Statement

Gaza, 9, November 2009: The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, Maxwell Gaylard and the non-governmental organization consortium, the Association for International Development Agencies, today called for the long-overdue and immediate opening of crossings into the Gaza Strip to enable Palestinian communities and families to prepare for the coming winter and rainy season.

“With winter rains and cold weather now imminent, the people of Gaza are even more desperately in need of construction materials such as cement, roofing tiles and glass to build and repair homes destroyed and damaged in the Israeli military offensive of 2008/2009 (Operation “Cast Lead”), as well as of regular supplies of fuel, electricity and clean water”, said Mr Gaylard. “The winter will be particularly hard on the children of Gaza, whose capacity to withstand the rigours of a cold wet winter has already been severely undermined by a marked deterioration of basic services and descent into poverty,” he added.

More than two years of blockade coupled with widespread destruction resulting from the “Cast Lead” offensive have caused severe damage to the homes, roads and utilities of Gaza. This includes tens of thousands of homes damaged or destroyed, deterioration and further damage to already fragile and over-loaded water, sanitation and electricity distribution networks, and a marked fall-off in the quality of essential services. Intensive discussions which the United Nations has conducted with the Government of Israel for the resumption of suspended building projects, which would provide much-needed housing and social services for the people of Gaza, have not yet yielded any positive outcome.

A total of 1,393 Gazans were killed and more than 5,000 injured during the three-week offensive, leaving communities, families and children fearful and traumatized, many of them living in the ruins of their homes, virtually destitute, and relying increasingly on the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for daily sustenance. In total, 3,535 homes were destroyed, 2,854 suffered severe damage and 52,900 suffered minor damage. Without repair, winter winds and rain will render damaged homes uninhabitable.

The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator together with the non-governmental organisations operating in the occupied Palestinian territory call upon the Government of Israel to facilitate the entry into Gaza, of urgently-needed construction and repair materials, of adequate supplies of industrial fuel for electricity generation, and essential items for the proper functioning of water and sanitation systems. “The people of Gaza share with everyone else the right to dignified lives, free of indiscriminate and prolonged suffering. They should not be subjected to this continuation of collective punishment brought on by the blockade”, said Mr. Gaylard.