

Davos, 29 January 2009 - Press Conference by the United Nations Secretary-General on Flash Appeal for Humanitarian Needs in Gaza

SG: Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It is a great pleasure to meet you and thank you for your participation in this press conference on the situation in Gaza. As you know, I recently visited Gaza. The civilian population has suffered greatly during three weeks of military operations. More than a third of the 6,600 dead and injured were children and women. As a father of three, I was especially troubled by their suffering and the psychological trauma so many families went through. Help is indeed needed urgently: food, clean water, shelter, medicine, restoration of basic services. Everywhere I went, I saw the evidence of critical humanitarian needs. The population were already vulnerable because of so many months of severely restricted supplies. That is why the Humanitarian Flash Appeal for Gaza that we are announcing today is so timely and so important. With the help of this \$ 613 million appeal, the United Nations and other aid agencies can jump into action to help the 1.4 million civilians in the Gaza Strip to recover.

I gave the people of Gaza my word that the United Nations would help in this hour of great need. I promised that I would do that all what I can do in my power as Secretary-General of the United Nations.

I immediately sent, as you know, a humanitarian needs assessment mission to Gaza, led by Sir John Holmes. I made this one of my highest priorities. I asked them to deliver their initial assessment as quickly as possible. It shows that these needs are massive and multifaceted. Without urgent action, Gaza faces an even greater humanitarian calamity. People have lost their families. They have lost their homes, belongings and livelihoods. Schools, clinics, factories and businesses have been destroyed. Many of Gaza's inhabitants still lack clean water and electricity. Too many are living in the midst of raw sewage and the threats to their health that brings. By answering the call of this appeal, in the amount of \$ 613 million, the world can help overcome at least some measure of their hardship. The money we are asking for will provide basic lifesaving aid: food, water, sanitation, health care and shelter. It will support basic services, such as education. It will help to remove the debris of war, including unexploded ordnance. It will finance emergency repairs for basic infrastructure. It will provide psychological help for the victims.

I now appeal to the world at large to help me keep my word to the people of Gaza, so that they can get the urgent help that they deserve.

I thank you very much for your support.

Following these statements, the floor was opened to questions from journalists.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, don't you believe that Israel holds a special responsibility for restoring what they destroyed in their war on Gaza?

SG: I think the whole international community, including Israel, should take part in these noble efforts to help the people in Gaza, who have suffered too much from these military operations. Particularly when it comes to humanitarian assistance, there should be no politics involved. Israelis might have initiated this military operation for some political or other reasons. But when I saw the people in Gaza, the destruction and severity of the challenges were beyond description. Therefore, I urge the whole international community to make generous contributions. This will be for urgently needed humanitarian assistance and for early recovery. For other medium- and long-term reconstruction issues, there the international community will continue to discuss how and what will be the best way to help Gazan society.

Q: Mr. Ban Ki-moon, what is your reaction to what happened two days ago in Rafah again, breaking the ceasefire?

SG: The incident which took place two days ago clearly shows us that this ceasefire is very fragile. Therefore this ceasefire must be translated into a durable and sustainable one, which can be respected by all the parties concerned. That is one of the priorities at this time for the international community to address. Right now, I am talking about the two most urgent priority issues on the situation in Gaza. One is the humanitarian issue, how to alleviate the humanitarian suffering for the people, Palestinians, particularly in Gaza. This is what we are doing. The second, but at the same time, parallel, priority will be to make this ceasefire a durable one. This is exactly what I have been emphasizing since day one of the outbreak of this violence on 27 December.

Now, for that to [be] possible, all the crossings should be opened to make goods and people freely move, in accordance with the 2005 agreement on movement and access.

Then, there is an idea of how to prevent the smugglings of illicit weapons and arms into Gaza again, which may only strengthen the capacity of Hamas during this time of ceasefire. That is a very serious issue, and I am encouraged that many countries, particularly the United States and some European countries, have offered their technical support to prevent these smugglings in the wider region. In fact these smugglings have taken place in a much wider region than expected and we must address this issue.

These are all very important and imminently addressable issues, which the United Nations is doing in close coordination with many important stakeholders.

Q: During the course of the conflict, UNWRA and also the Human Rights Council have called for investigation on the possibility of the Israelis violating human rights laws. As the [Secretary-General of the] United Nations, how would you like to proceed on this front?

SG: Over the past several weeks, unacceptable and terrible situations have taken place against the civilian people and against particularly the United Nations compounds, where many civilians were sheltered. I myself saw and visited this compound, which has been destroyed by Israeli forces. It was just, again, unacceptable, and I was very much frustrated and upset and angered by what I had seen.

Now, when there are allegations of violations of international humanitarian laws, and where there are violations of humanitarian laws, there must be a thorough investigation. I have asked [for a] full explanation and a thorough investigation into this bombing of the United Nations compound. When I met Prime Minister Olmert and the Foreign and Defence Ministers of the Israeli Government they assured me that they will look into this issue seriously and will get back to me. I am also going to establish our own independent investigation to look into the case of this UNWRA compound bombing. That is what I can tell you at this time. The United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to ask for an investigation. I am waiting for any assessment or results of this investigation to be conducted by the Human Rights Council.

Q: I take your point about delinking the politics of this from the humanitarian aspect, because it has clearly been a problem so far. I wanted to ask you to comment on two things if you could: one, Israeli claims that Hamas has been responsible for hijacking humanitarian supplies going into Gaza, which has been brought up by the Israeli several times over the delivery of aid; and, secondly, the impact of decisions like the one by the BBC not to broadcast the United Kingdom Disaster Emergency Committee appeal on the grounds that this might compromise their neutrality?

SG: I believe still that, in delivering humanitarian assistance, politics should have no place to stand. Therefore, either Hamas, or any party, they should fully cooperate. Israelis should open up these crossings to allow for free and smooth delivery of humanitarian goods – immediate humanitarian and other materials which may be necessary for early recovery. This is what I am emphasizing again. Hamas should not take any political aspect [stance] on this. After all, they are people too and they are Palestinian people.

At this time, I would like to again urge the unity of the Palestinian people. There must be some sort of reconciliation at this time. I know that this will not take place overnight. There is a serious division. All Arab countries should help Palestinian people in a united way so that Palestinian people can really talk about their own reconciliation. Without reconciliation how do you expect that this humanitarian assistance, as well as medium- and long-term social economic reconstruction can take place smoothly?

The international community is ready to provide such assistance. Now, they should also fully cooperate.

On the second question again, the BBC is accountable for its own editorial conclusions. Also, different broadcasters may reach different conclusions about whether they should promote peaceful humanitarian needs stemming from a conflict. I would welcome any steps that can help us secure necessary humanitarian funding for those people who are in desperate need.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, where do you expect the \$ 613 million will actually come from, given the world's biggest economies are spending so much of their

Government budgets on supporting their own domestic financial systems?

SG: I am now appealing for the amount of \$ 613 million from the international community at large. I am appealing to all those potential donors to contribute generously. All this money and resources will be used for those people in Gaza for alleviating all this human sufferings at this time. They need medication, they need sanitation, they need schools to be reconstructed, they need sewage treatment properly. Those were basic human lifesaving necessities. I am now appealing to all countries. I do not know which countries will contribute or how much. But I am just appealing to the whole international community at large.
