



Statement
29 December 2008

WHO warns of rise in deaths, human suffering in Gaza

Geneva/ Cairo/ Jerusalem – WHO calls for an immediate end to hostilities in the Gaza Strip and urges Israel to ensure immediate provision of fuel and critical life-saving/trauma care supplies.

Hundreds of wounded people, including women, children and elderly, lie in hospitals that already lack basic supplies. Over the past two days, violence and military activities in Gaza have killed around 330 people and left 900 injured, according to latest reports.

The inability of the hospitals to cope with a problem of this magnitude, if the situation continues unchanged, will result in a surge in preventable deaths from complications due to trauma. Civilians are paying the price for the prolonged blockade. As a top priority, the shortages of essential and life-saving medicines needs to be abated without delay. The current escalation of the violence only compounds the health situation and unnecessarily exacerbates the fragile status of the civilians caught up in this conflict.

WHO has secured, in collaboration with several Member States, the dispatch of medical kits to cover surgical and trauma interventions. WHO is following up with the Palestinian and Israeli authorities to ensure that health relief supplies, including the medical kits already on hand, reach those who need them.

Negotiations with the Israelis are ongoing to guarantee the passage of urgent medical supplies today. WHO is also coordinating with other UN agencies, donors and nongovernmental organizations to ensure aid arrives to those most in need. The functioning of hospitals and access to health services is critical in order to respond to the mass casualties.

WHO reiterates its call for the immediate discontinuation of the current violence and the removal of blockades so that much-needed food, water, fuel, medicines and other humanitarian aid can reach those in need.