
STATEMENT ON HEBRON CLOSURES

25 July 2016

UNRWA is deeply concerned about the humanitarian impact of the closure applied by the Israeli authorities in the Hebron district, affecting in particular Fawwar refugee camp. The closure was implemented following a series of violent incidents that took place before the end of Ramadan in which two Israelis were killed: a stabbing attack in Kiryat Arba settlement on the outskirts of Hebron killing a 13-year old Israeli girl in her home (30 June), a drive-by shooting attack on Road 60, south of Hebron (1 July), and two separate stabbing attacks in Hebron (30 June and 1 July). The United Nations, including the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, has repeatedly condemned in the strongest terms, all such attacks. The UN condemns all violence impacting Israeli and Palestinian civilians.

Since the beginning of the closure, the main entrance of Fawwar camp has been closed for 25 consecutive days affecting approximately 9,500 refugees in Fawwar camp. These closures create serious challenges for UNRWA's humanitarian access, including the delivery of medical supplies, the removal of refuse from the camps, and the daily movement of Agency staff working inside the camp.

The closure has impacted the population both socially, economically, and places an increased health risk for camp residents. The main entrance is closed to vehicles, which has impacted camp residents' ability to report to their work outside the camp. The entrance can still be used by pedestrians, yet the extra distance that many have to travel due to avoid closures incurs additional expenses impacting their already bleak financial situation. UNRWA is also concerned about the disruption to the supply chain increasing the costs of basic commodities inside the camp.

UNRWA West Bank Field Director, Scott Anderson, visited the area on 19 July and was granted exceptional access through Fawwar main entrance only after coordination with the Israeli authorities. Following his visit, he stated "I condemn the closure as it collectively punishes the Fawwar camp residents. This is all the more disturbing when Fawwar camp residents – a refugee couple – were the first to respond to the Israeli family following the drive-by shooting incident, providing them with first aid before the arrival of the ambulances. While echoing the UN's repeated statements condemning violence against civilians, I call upon the Israeli authorities to refrain from collectively punishing innocent people for the acts of others." UNRWA will continue to liaise with the Israeli authorities to request passage of medical supplies in the camp in order to ensure the continuous supply of medicines and vaccinations for its health clinic.

International law prohibits the imposition of collective punishment in occupied territories. Art. 33(1) of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention to which Israel is a party and which applies to occupied territories, provides that "no person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed." This prohibition is considered absolute without any reservation regarding military necessity. Accordingly, UNRWA calls upon the Israeli authorities to put an end to the closures in the West Bank and to ensure unimpeded access for UNRWA staff and humanitarian assistance across the West Bank, thereby also safeguarding UNRWA's humanitarian space.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA Programme Budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall, projected for 2016 to stand at US\$ 74 million. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals.

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.

For more information, please contact:

Christopher Gunness

Spokesperson, Director of Advocacy & Strategic Communications

Mobile:

+972 (0)54 240 2659

Office:

+972 (0)2 589 0267

c.gunness@unrwa.org

Sami Mshasha

Chief of Communications, Arabic Language Spokesperson

Mobile:

+972 (0)54 216 8295

Office:

+972 (0)2 589 0724

s.mshasha@unrwa.org

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