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**Diplomats visit the Gaza Strip to better understand how thousands  
of Palestinians who remain displaced are affected by the winter**

*Gaza, 20 January 2015*

This morning, some twenty diplomats from nine countries visited the Gaza Strip to better understand the very difficult situation facing thousands of Palestinians this winter, particularly those who were displaced by the hostilities this past summer. Led by the Humanitarian Coordinator of the occupied Palestinian territory, Mr James W. Rawley, and UNRWA's Director of Operations in Gaza, Mr Robert Turner, the diplomats met with displaced Palestinians and discussed the need for long-term solutions for the coastal enclave.

"The war left more than 100,000 Palestinians homeless, over half of whom are children," said Mr Rawley. "Those living in makeshift shelters or pre-fabricated housing units are particularly vulnerable to the cold and rainy winter weather. Flooding and lack of adequate heating make a difficult situation even more miserable and dangerous."

To address these needs, and until there is significant reconstruction in Gaza, humanitarian actors are in urgent need of additional funding both for the refugees and non-refugee population. The 2015 Strategic Response Plan for the occupied Palestinian territory requests \$705 million, more than 70 per cent of which is for the Gaza Strip, including winter-related needs of vulnerable populations.

In Gaza city, participants visited an UNRWA collective centre, which still hosts almost 900 Palestinians whose homes were severely damaged or destroyed.

"To date, almost \$80 million in payments have been made by UNRWA to families with damaged or destroyed homes," said Mr Turner. "However, by the end of January, UNRWA will run out of money for repair and rental subsidies. The impact on families will be disastrous. Over 96,000 Palestine refugee homes were damaged or destroyed, which is more than double what we estimated," he added.

"We also need to look beyond the immediate challenges. The escalation of hostilities may have ceased for now, but the blockade of Gaza continues to impact all aspects of daily Palestinian life and impedes the development of the Gaza Strip," Mr Turner concluded.

"The Gaza crisis did not start this summer," Mr Rawley stressed. "Seven years of blockade and the ongoing conflict have exhausted people's coping mechanisms and increased aid dependency and food insecurity." He reiterated the statements of UN Special Coordinator, Mr Robert Serry, emphasizing that the United Nations will continue to exert all efforts towards a lifting of the closures and acceleration of reconstruction and recovery efforts, alongside the consolidation of the current, fragile ceasefire and the strengthening of the Palestinian Government of National Consensus, which are essential to turn Gaza into a liveable place.

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