
World Health Day 2009: Gazans Still Recovering From Ill Effects of Conflict

On the eve of World Health Day, 7 April, children and families in the Gaza Strip continue to suffer ill effects from a lack of access to humanitarian support.

Although the conflict there ended in January, insecurity inside Gaza persists and armed clashes occasionally result in civilian casualties. Meanwhile, the level of aid allowed into the territory remains below what is urgently required. UNICEF is concerned that the decline in socio-economic and physical security in Gaza will lead to a slow deterioration of the health and nutritional status of the population, especially children.

Health Facilities in Emergencies

The thematic focus of World Health Day 2009 is on health facilities in emergencies. The annual observance commemorates the founding of the World Health Organization.

Women and children are most vulnerable in areas affected by emergencies, including those caused by natural disasters and those resulting from conflicts. Hospitals and other health facilities play a critical role in the continuum of care from mother to child. UNICEF is committed to ensuring that such care continues despite emergencies.

Shortage of Essential Materials

In Gaza, many health centres were destroyed during the fighting. This makes it difficult for the population – particularly mothers – “to access the health facilities, to access what they need for treating their children,” said UNICEF Gaza Health and Nutrition Officer Rafat Hassouna. “A lot of equipment has been destroyed, so to replenish this takes a lot of time.” But essential materials for the repair and maintenance of the water and sanitation network, such as pipes and spare parts, are not getting into Gaza. “Most of the sewage system is flowing into the sea, which makes the sea all polluted,” Mr. Hassouna said, adding that the raw sewage poses health dangers for women and their children, who play in seaside areas. Through its partners, UNICEF is working to restore access to health services and safe water and sanitation for all areas of Gaza affected by the recent conflict.