



PRESS STATEMENT



**UN Humanitarian Coordinator:
Gaza Blockade Suffocating Agriculture Sector, Creating Food Insecurity**

25 MAY 2010

Humanitarian aid agencies call upon the Government of Israel for full and unfettered access into and out of the Gaza Strip for materials and exports necessary for the revival of the agriculture and fishing sectors and for the lifting of restrictions imposed on Palestinian access to farm land and fishing areas.

Since the imposition of Israel's blockade on the Gaza Strip in June 2007, the formal economy in Gaza has collapsed. Over sixty (60) percent of households are now food insecure, threatening the health and wellbeing of children, women and men. In this context, agriculture offers some practical solutions to a humanitarian problem. However, Israel's import and access restrictions continue to suffocate the agriculture sector and directly contribute to rising food insecurity. Of particular concern, farmers and fishers' lives are regularly put at risk, due to Israel's enforcement of its access restrictions. The fact that this coastal population now imports fish from Israel and through tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border speaks to the absurdity of the situation.

A rapid recovery of the sector will reinstate the local population's access to affordable fresh foods, especially fresh meat and fish, and protect farming and fishing livelihoods. The acting Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt), Philippe Lazzarini, representing humanitarian aid agencies, and the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), representing over 80 NGOs, is in the Gaza Strip to reiterate this message.

Lazzarini emphasizes, "saving agricultural livelihoods and local food production in Gaza depends on three factors: (i) the opening of border crossings to provide humanitarian and commercial access to agricultural materials and international markets; (ii) unrestricted and safe access to vital agricultural land and fishing zones; and (iii) access to materials necessary to prevent long-term damage to soil, stemming from the uncontrolled dumping of sewage, salination, unexploded ordinance and other contamination." In the absence of such improvements, the entire fishing and farming sectors in the Gaza Strip are at risk of collapse. The Gaza population at-large is already becoming increasingly dependent on humanitarian aid.

Therefore, the humanitarian community is urging the Israeli authorities to implement the following measures immediately: allow the entry of sufficient amounts of agricultural input materials such as plastic irrigation piping, quality seeds/seedlings and veterinary drugs into Gaza needed to jumpstart the agricultural sector and allow the export of produce; lift access restrictions on farming and fishing areas; allow the entry of material required to enable significant upgrades to Gaza's wastewater treatment infrastructure to address environmental concerns in order to avoid additional contamination of agricultural land; and to create an alternative source of water for irrigation.

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