



Statement on Gaza by United Nations Humanitarian Agencies working in the occupied Palestinian territory

August 3rd 2006

The United Nations humanitarian agencies working in the occupied Palestinian territory are deeply alarmed by the impact continuing violence is having on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Gaza, which has resulted in a sharp decline in the humanitarian situation facing 1.4 million people, more than half of them children. We are concerned that with international attention focusing on Lebanon, the tragedy in Gaza is being forgotten. We estimate that since 28 June, 175 Palestinians have been killed, including approximately 40 children and eight women, and over 620 injured in the Gaza Strip. One IDF soldier has been killed and 25 Israelis have been injured, including 11 Israelis injured by homemade rockets fired from the Gaza Strip. Palestinians have fired on average between 8-9 homemade rockets per day towards Israel (319 in total) and the Israeli military has fired on average 200-250 artillery shells per day into the Gaza Strip and conducted at least 220 aerial bombings. The latest IDF incursion in the area around the Gaza Airport overnight has left eight Palestinians dead, including a 12 year-old girl and 20 injured. UNRWA estimates that at least 475 families have fled their homes in the area and are now being sheltered in an UNRWA school in nearby Rafah.

Under international humanitarian law, according to **the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** all parties to the conflict are obliged to protect civilians during hostilities. Parties must exercise precaution and respect the principle of proportionality in all military operations to prevent unnecessary suffering among the civilian population. The shelling of sites with alleged military significance that result invariably in the killing of civilians, among them an increasing number of children, cannot be justified. All parties are urged to bear in mind that international law demands accountability and that individual criminal responsibility may be engaged for violations of international humanitarian law.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) reports an increasing number of displaced Palestinians as a result of the continuous shelling and violence in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA is currently sheltering 1,345 people from 289 families in four schools in the northern district of Jabalia. Almost all are refugees, fleeing the relentless shelling of the eastern edge of the neighboring town of Beit Hanoun and the area around the Al Nada housing estate in Beit Lahia. In addition to shelter UNRWA is providing the families with daily food parcels and medical care.

According to **The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)** UN facilities as well as large tracts of agricultural land have been damaged during continuing IDF ground incursions. The United Nations office, including OCHA's in Gaza was ransacked by Palestinian demonstrators on 30 July 2006. In addition, access and movement in and out of Gaza remain key concerns. While the Karni crossing has opened for humanitarian supplies and some commercial imports, it remains closed for exports. In addition, the Rafah crossing for passengers has remained closed, and the Erez crossing opens intermittently. These closures have significantly affected the ability of Gazans to obtain essential medical care not available in Gaza. OCHA reports that the Israeli security forces have instituted a new policy: telephoning Palestinian families to evacuate their homes before launching air strikes. This phenomenon is causing panic to entire Palestinian neighbourhoods. In addition, Palestinian households have been receiving just 6-8 hours of electric supply per day since the Israeli bombing of Gaza's only electric power plant.

The World Food Programme (WFP) reports that the shelling and violence is not only harming agriculture, but also contributing to a further reduction in people's purchasing power, prompting increased dependency on food aid. The main staples for Palestinians - wheat flour and sugar - remain in short supply with prices 15% and 33% respectively higher than in January this year. The harvest is being disrupted by problems at the Ministry of Agriculture, where staff have not been paid since January, combined with considerable losses of land, assets and a lack of fertilizers. To support the nutrition of the most vulnerable non refugee population in Gaza during at this critical time, WFP is increasing the number of people it feeds from 160,000 people to 220,000 people monthly.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the targeting of Gaza's vital infrastructures, particularly the destruction of the only domestic power plant, has triggered a chain reaction of lack of power, scarcity of fuel for generators and water shortage, thus causing a serious threat to people's health and harming the functioning of the entire health system. Provisional measures to avert the crisis are being set up by the local institutions and the international community. The "Temporary International Mechanism" - among others - shall address emergency needs of the health sector, providing medical supplies, fuel, and allowances for health workers. Of further concern is the lack of access to health care

in Egypt and Jordan due to Rafah border total and prolonged closure. WHO continues monitoring the situation to identify early warning signs of crisis in the health system and health status of the Palestinian people.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is concerned about declining incomes in the farming and fishing sectors. With the recent imposition of severe fishing restrictions, boats are not leaving port, thus crippling the industry (as well as the income of some 35,000 people) and resulting in the absence of fish on the local market. Declining cash incomes and dwindling international aid is impairing the ability of producers to acquire seeds, fertilizer, spare parts for greenhouses, irrigation facilities and fishing boat maintenance. There is an acute emergency due to the lack of fuel to operate water wells. Many orchards and fruit trees could be lost for ever, while the shortage of vegetables may exacerbate nutritional imbalances.

According to **the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** some 838,000 Palestinian children living in Gaza are bearing the brunt of disproportionate shelling and attacks. Shortages and closures make it virtually impossible to deliver quality care, while simultaneously fueling the conditions for outbreaks of communicable disease, which hits children hardest. Of the approximately 40 Palestinian children killed in Gaza in since 28 June, almost a quarter were under 10 years old. Since the beginning of 2006, 69 children have died due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including one Israeli child. Given the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, UNICEF is stepping up its support in health, education, water and sanitation, psychosocial counseling, and recreational activities for adolescents and younger children.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reports that the shelling and violence in Gaza has impaired the access of civilians, especially women, to life-saving services such as emergency obstetric care. UNFPA is deeply concerned about the recent shelling that damaged health facilities and restricted access to reproductive health services, especially ante-natal and post-natal care. Further, access for health care providers to reach their place of work has been jeopardized, particularly in areas of heavy shelling and military closure. Since the beginning of the violence, UNFPA has continuously supported procurement of essential items for the delivery of health care, including disposables, supplies, drugs and equipment to the Ministry of Health, particularly those related to maternal and women's health.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM is extremely alarmed over the situation in Gaza Strip. Ever since the beginning of the Israeli latest incursion over Gaza Strip which started at on 28 June 2006, Palestinians have been a target for the Israeli army's multiple shelling and bombing which resulted in 175 people being killed of which at least eight are women. Being a vulnerable group, women have lost their own lives, their husbands, brothers, fathers and children's lives and have been badly injured and traumatized; in addition to the destruction of people's homes, sources of income and infrastructure. With the continuation of this situation, the devastation of women's lives and their psychological wellbeing will become permanent and any efforts to redeem these effects will become futile. As a rapid response, UNIFEM has launched an emergency intervention program of outreach psychological counseling for women across Gaza with the help of the Gaza Community mental health program. The Fund will also launch another food security initiative for rural women to lend a helping hand in this hard economic situation

These facts speak for themselves. Closures must be lifted, bearing in mind Israel's legitimate security concerns. Gaza must be given back the capacity to export its goods. Both the Palestinian rocket attacks from Gaza and the disproportionate shelling by the IDF must stop. The United Nations stands firmly by its commitments to uphold the dignity of the Israelis and the people of Gaza - and the right of both sides to live in peace and security.

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