



# **RAFAH HUMANITARIAN NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

## **SUBMISSION TO THE LOCAL AID CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE**

**Prepared by UNRWA and UN OCHA**

**6 June 2004**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Rafah Needs Assessment, June 2004**

#### **Objectives of the assessment**

- To assess the humanitarian needs arising from the IDF incursions and house demolitions in Rafah – including the recent incursions in May 2004 – and from economic decline and poverty;
- To outline the response of aid agencies to humanitarian needs in Rafah, including an assessment of current shortfalls in assistance;
- To evaluate the sustainability of humanitarian assistance under current conditions.

#### **Shelter**

##### **Needs**

- During May 2004, 298 buildings were demolished in Rafah and almost 3,800 people were made homeless. A further 270 residential buildings housing 502 families were damaged during the May incursions.
- The incursions which took place in May were larger in scale than any other month since September 2000. However, a total of 1,497 buildings have been destroyed in Rafah as a result of IDF activities since September 2000, and 15,009 individuals have been made homeless. 82.5% of these homeless people are refugees.
- 2,041 homes in Rafah have been registered as damaged or in need of repairs as a result of IDF activities since September 2000.
- After the demolition of buildings in May, UNRWA established transit centres in central Rafah to accommodate people who had been made homeless. The relatively slow movement out of these centres is of serious concern, as it indicates that housing alternatives have reached capacity.

##### **Response**

- The Palestinian Ministry of Housing has carried out 4,000 repairs of homes in Rafah in September 2000; in the same period, UNRWA has assisted 510 families eligible for assistance in repairing their homes.
- UNRWA distributes rental support every three months to 2,061 families in Rafah; UNRWA seeks to extend this support to an additional 560 families made homeless in May.
- A total of 232 new housing units been built to accommodate homeless in Rafah by UNRWA and the Ministry of Housing (30 remain unoccupied because of their proximity to an IDF base). A further 261 buildings are under construction and 168 are planned. UNRWA has spent, or is in the process of spending, \$12,106,474 on re-housing in Rafah.

##### **Unmet needs, sustainability of response**

- Rafah was crowded before September 2000. Because of extensive demolitions, availability of accommodation for rent in Rafah is now very limited.
- UNRWA estimates that even if no further demolitions occur in Rafah, and if all current or planned housing schemes are completed, 1,691 of the families eligible for UNRWA housing will remain homeless unless additional funding and land is available to re-house them.
- Re-housing a family in Rafah costs approximately \$20,000. If all the remaining homeless families were to be re-housed, the cost would be approximately \$44,760,000. UNRWA estimates the unfunded shortfall for re-housing eligible refugee families alone to be \$35,055,272.
- Finding new plots for homes in the Rafah area is difficult. Space is limited and much existing space is in areas affected by military violence.
- With accommodation so scarce in Rafah, the alternative for housing homeless families is either in school buildings or tent villages. The latter option risks severe sanitation and health problems and community dislocation.

#### **Food**

##### **Needs**

- Over the past twelve months levels of food insecurity in Rafah have almost doubled. According to the World Food Programme, 66% of the population of Rafah (109,254 individuals) is food insecure, compared with 35% in 2003. Another 17% is in danger of becoming food insecure should the current conditions continue.
- Rafah is one of the most food insecure areas of the occupied Palestinian territories.
- Rafah is particularly restricted by Israeli closure measures, and Palestinians living there are consequently isolated from sources of employment and income.

### **Response**

- Of Rafah's population of 166,700, 149,370 (89.6%) receive some food aid on a regular basis.
- 16,500 families also receive cash assistance, to enhance their capacity to purchase food and other necessary goods.
- In response to the May incursions, UNRWA supplied daily meals to affected families in Rafah.

### **Unmet needs, implementation problems**

- While tight closure is maintained around Rafah and the entire Gaza Strip, and access to agricultural land and fishing are restricted, a large proportion of Rafah's population will remain food insecure.
- Due to funding shortfalls, UNRWA food aid to 'new poor' beneficiaries in 2003 was only able to provide 40% of recipients' daily calorific needs instead of 67% as originally planned.
- Repeated closure of the Karni terminal and tightening of security measures has significantly reduced the volume of foodstuffs brought in through the terminal. This is expected to result in higher food prices on imported goods.

### **Health**

- In the aftermath of the May incursions, public health degenerated as a consequence of damage to water and sewage networks and overcrowded facilities.
- Rafah secondary healthcare facilities are operating at maximum capacity. There are 3.3 hospital beds for every 10,000 people in Rafah. The Palestinian national average is 13.8 beds per 10,000.
- Support by healthcare facilities elsewhere in the Gaza Strip is frequently limited by movement restrictions imposed by IDF.

### **Infrastructure**

- The poor state of Rafah's infrastructure caused public health problems even before recent demolitions occurred.
- Additional damage during IDF incursions in May to water and electricity lines, roads and public buildings compounds problems caused by weak infrastructure.
- Due to the repeated incursions and ensuing destruction, there are limited funds for upgrading and developing the existing networks. All available funds are channeled into immediate repair work, leaving little for long term infrastructure development.

### **Psycho-social**

- The population of Rafah has suffered stress and trauma from repeated incursions. Psycho-social assistance helps to support Palestinians who have been subjected to violence, and is important for the long-term well-being and rehabilitation of the community.
- The number of locally trained professionals required to assess needs and provide intervention in the psycho-social sector is insufficient.
- Funding from donors has been particularly short in this sector.

### **Conclusions**

Public health risks, food insecurity and damage to infrastructure are becoming increasingly severe problems for the people of Rafah. Successive incursions have resulted in the severe degradation of community resources. However, homelessness is the most pressing humanitarian issue. Land for re-housing and funds remain in short supply, so if further demolitions occur the homeless may be forced to live in tent villages. This risks severe sanitation and health problems, and even greater community dislocation.

In this context, Israel's apparent escalation of its demolition operation in Rafah is a source of grave concern to humanitarian agencies. During 2002, an average of 15 homes were destroyed or damaged beyond repair every month in Rafah. In 2003, the rate of home demolition increased to an average of more than 47 homes a month. So far this year, Israel has demolished an average 100 homes per month in Rafah.

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## INTRODUCTION

Between 17 and 24 May, the Israel Defense Forces undertook a military operation in Rafah, code-named 'Operation Rainbow'. According to the IDF, "[t]he target of the operation was to secure the neighbourhoods along the Philadelphi road [which divides the Gaza Strip from Egypt] and to make sure that they are clean from terrorists and wanted operatives."<sup>1</sup>

'Operation Rainbow' resulted in the deaths of over 40 Palestinians. Between 1 and 31 May, a total of 298 buildings were demolished in Rafah, leaving 3,794 individuals – or 710 families – homeless.<sup>2</sup> IDF operations also resulted in substantial damage to water and sanitation infrastructure, the electricity network and roads in Rafah. Crops, greenhouses, water irrigation systems and farm equipment were also destroyed or damaged.

The May incursions were larger in scale than previous incidents of house demolition in Rafah. They attracted international attention, and were condemned by the UN Secretary-General and the Presidency of the European Union.<sup>3</sup> Since September 2000, however, a total of 1,497 buildings – most of which were adjacent to the border with Egypt – have been demolished by the IDF.<sup>4</sup> 15,009 Palestinians have been made homeless as a result, and many have lost most of their possessions.

This paper assesses the humanitarian consequences of incursions and closure for the people of Rafah. The objectives of the paper are:

- to assess the humanitarian needs arising from the IDF incursions and house demolitions in Rafah – including the recent incursions in May 2004 – and from economic decline and poverty;
- to outline the response of aid agencies to humanitarian needs in Rafah, including an assessment of current shortfalls in assistance;
- to evaluate the sustainability of humanitarian assistance under current conditions.

The assessment sets out the background to the current crisis in Rafah. Immediate and medium term humanitarian needs in five sectors – shelter, food, health, infrastructure and psycho-social support – are then described. The paper also sets out the response of aid agencies and an assessment of outstanding needs and problems. An analysis of the sustainability of the humanitarian response to the crisis follows.

Satellite imagery attached to this assessment compares the status of land areas in 2001 and 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> Israel Defense Forces: Summary of the briefing held by the GOC southern command regarding the operation in Rafah, 25 May 2004. Available at: <http://www1.idf.il/DOVER/site/mainpage.asp?sl=EN&id=7&docid=31531.EN&unit=13869>

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise specified, figures regarding demolished homes, numbers of affected families and temporary shelter are from UNRWA. UNRWA counts the number of buildings demolished, the number of individuals made homeless by demolitions, and the number of families made homeless. (In May, 710 families were made homeless. On average, 12.7 people were living in each of the buildings demolished or rendered uninhabitable in May.)

<sup>3</sup> See Annex for selected UN statements regarding the Rafah incursions.

<sup>4</sup> In assessing damage following incursions, UNRWA counts the number of buildings demolished completely or damaged to the extent that they are uninhabitable. UNRWA also calculates how many housing units are needed to re-house the families made homeless by incursions. The number of housing units required is generally larger than the number of buildings demolished, because many of the buildings housed more than one family.

## **RAFAH HUMANITARIAN NEEDS ASSESSMENT: APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

In March 2004, the Humanitarian Emergency Policy Group requested that UN OCHA and UNRWA conduct a joint assessment of humanitarian needs and assistance in Rafah. To ensure that data collected for the assessment followed a standard format, UNRWA and OCHA circulated an information matrix to agencies through the Gaza Operational Co-ordination Group, which is an interagency body chaired by UNRWA.

UN agencies, international and national NGOs operating in Rafah, and the Rafah Municipality supplied information for the needs assessment. (The names of contributing organizations are at Annex B.) The data collected covered the period of January 2003 to February 2004, with the exception of shelter, which was assessed from September 2000.

Following the IDF incursions into Rafah in May 2004 and the heavy damage caused to buildings and infrastructure, publication of the assessment was delayed to incorporate and update the subsequent needs and response. As a result, the base of this assessment covers the one year period from January 2003 to February 2004. The assessment also contains updated information relating to the May 2004 incursions, where it has been possible to obtain such information.

The housing damage estimates have been largely drawn from UNRWA sources and supported by field visits from other UN and NGO personnel and through an analysis of satellite imagery. As a point of reference, IDF estimations have also been considered.

While all efforts have been made to ensure that this report is accurate, field assessments are still being finalized, especially in the infrastructure sector. Moreover, IDF incursions and demolitions continued into June. As the situation remains in flux, all figures listed in this assessment should be considered provisional.

## **BACKGROUND: Humanitarian crisis in Rafah**

A humanitarian crisis is facing the city of Rafah. Land clearance and demolitions are the major cause of the crisis. Widespread poverty compounds the situation.

### **Demolition of homes**

Most of the 15,009 Palestinians made homeless by demolitions are living in temporary accommodation or with family and friends, in conditions that are cramped and often unsanitary.

Four years of conflict and closure have eroded the ability of Rafah's population to cope with the effects of IDF incursions. Each new wave of homeless people adds pressure to stretched public services and community support structures, and places heavy strains on the community as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Space to re-house the 710 families made homeless in May is nearly saturated. On 6 June, 539 people were still living in two of the three school buildings set up as transit centres in central Rafah. Usually such transit centres house people for only a few days following incursions. The slow movement out of the transit centres is of serious concern, as it indicates that options for temporary shelter have reached capacity. UNRWA has established showers and central kitchens in the centres. It is likely that homeless persons will remain in the centres for some time.

### **Poverty and Unemployment**

The problems facing Palestinians made homeless in Rafah are compounded by widespread poverty and unemployment. Three quarters of Gaza's population live in poverty,<sup>6</sup> and 90% of Rafah's population are refugees.<sup>7</sup> Closures and access problems for Rafah's residents contribute to the poor economic situation:

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<sup>5</sup> Rafah District includes Rafah city, Rafah camp and villages. All areas in Rafah that are referred to as 'Blocks' are part of the camp; areas that are not referred to as 'Blocks' lie outside the camp. Brasil, Salam, Tal es Sultan are not in the camp. Many refugees also live outside the camp.

<sup>6</sup> People living on under \$2.10 per day are defined as poor by the World Bank.

<sup>7</sup> Poverty levels among refugees in oPt are higher than among the population as a whole.

- In 2002, approximately 4,474 Palestinians from Rafah earned incomes in Israel.<sup>8</sup> However, Palestinians from Rafah with work permits to Israel often find it impossible to travel north through Abu-Holi checkpoint and Erez crossing to access their jobs. No Palestinian worker has been permitted to pass through Erez since 22 March 2004.
- Since September 2000, approximately 1,840 acres of agricultural land in Rafah District was seized by Israeli forces or leveled.<sup>9</sup>
- The Rafah district is divided up by Israeli military infrastructure into sections, some of which are closed to each other and to the sea. This is most evident in the Al Mawasi area inside the Gush Katif block, where fertile agricultural lands are inaccessible to non-residents of Al Mawasi.
- In 2001, 400 of the district's residents were registered as fishermen.<sup>10</sup> Israel has banned fishing off the Al Mawasi coast since October 2003.
- Commercial goods traveling to and from Israel must pass through Karni terminal, which is frequently closed.<sup>11</sup> Restrictions on commercial links with Egypt have increased since September 2000. New security measures introduced in early June at Karni – including the laying of 150 cement blocks – will slow loading and off-loading on the Palestinian side, and reduce the volume of goods entering and leaving Gaza.

## HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND ASSISTANCE

The following section assesses humanitarian issues relating to shelter, food, health, infrastructure and psycho-social assistance.

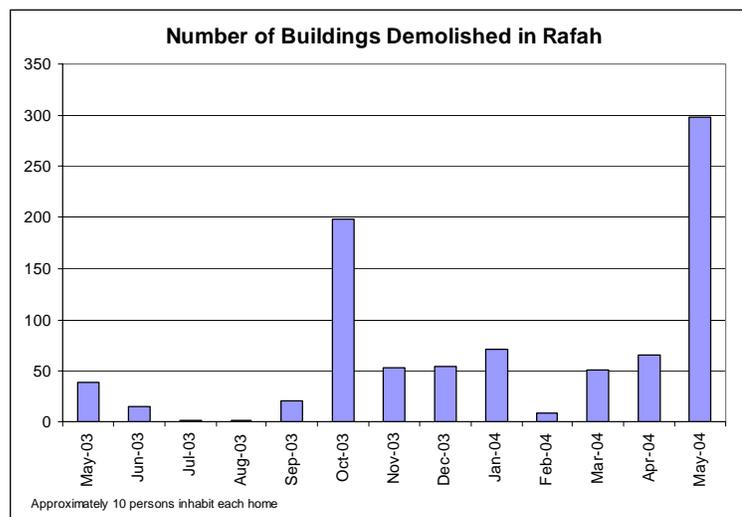
### I. SHELTER

**In May 2004, the number of Palestinians requiring shelter in Rafah increased by one-third. 15,009 Palestinians in Rafah have been made homeless by demolitions. Needs substantially outstrip those anticipated by UNRWA.**

#### A. Needs

The housing problem in Rafah is reaching crisis level. Since September 2000, 1,497 buildings have been destroyed in Rafah, and 15,009 persons have been made homeless.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the destroyed homes, more than 2000 homes have been registered as damaged or in need of repairs.

During May 2004, 710 additional Palestinian families, or almost 3,800 people, were made homeless after their homes were destroyed or damaged beyond repair by the IDF. They also lost furniture, household supplies and equipment.



<sup>8</sup> UNDP/MOPIC Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) Project Report on Rafah District, March 2002.

<sup>9</sup> UNRWA estimate based on figures provided by the Ministry of Agriculture.

<sup>10</sup> UNDP/MOPIC Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) Project Report on Rafah District, March 2002.

<sup>11</sup> According to UNSCO, between 1 October 2000 and 31 May 2004 Karni was closed for 113 days completely, 50 days partially and 107 days for official Israeli and Palestinian holidays. UNSCO considers the days during which humanitarian assistance was allowed to enter Gaza as partial opening days.

<sup>12</sup> On average, 10 people were living in each building.

In addition to the totally demolished buildings, 270 residential buildings housing 502 families<sup>13</sup> were damaged during the IDF incursions in May. These buildings are still habitable but require repairs.

Most of the buildings destroyed or damaged in Rafah are situated in the refugee camp, adjacent to the Egyptian border. This area was allocated to house Palestinian refugees in 1948.

Some of the homeless have taken refuge in empty storage areas and shops, which often lack basic sanitation and other facilities. Very few families have left Rafah to live elsewhere, as most depend on their social networks in the area.

## **B. Humanitarian Assistance and Response**

### **1. Emergency response to the May 2004 incursions**

In response to the demolitions in May, UNRWA provided ongoing temporary accommodation for approximately 2,500 people in three UNRWA school buildings in the centre of Rafah. UNRWA and a number of NGOs provided mattresses, blankets, kitchen kits and fresh food. The number of people accommodated in these transit centres has been falling gradually, but over 500 remain.<sup>14</sup> UNRWA is now seeking funds to cover the cost of providing three meals per day for those still accommodated in UNRWA schools for a period of at least one month.<sup>15</sup>

Other Palestinians left homeless have found emergency shelter in rented accommodation, with relatives, in garages or other empty premises.

UNRWA proposes to support each family directly affected by the latest incursion with a one-time \$300 payment. In addition to relocation fees, UNRWA is supporting families made homeless with emergency food aid and in-kind support.

### **2. Medium-Term Response**

**Repairs:** A number of agencies have undertaken repairs to damaged buildings following IDF incursions. The Palestinian Ministry of Housing has carried out 4,000 repairs of homes in Rafah since September 2000.<sup>16</sup> In the same period, UNRWA has assisted 510 families eligible for assistance in repairing their homes.

**Rental Support:** UNRWA currently distributes rental support every three months to 2,061 families whose homes have been destroyed during Israeli military operations, or have been forced to leave homes located in areas under threat of demolition. Refugee families who lack alternative means of housing are eligible for support, unless their income is sufficient to cover the cost of rental. In its Supplementary Appeal for Rafah, UNRWA proposes to help an additional 560 families made homeless by the recent incursion with rental support.<sup>17</sup>

**Re-housing:** The Palestinian Ministry of Housing and the Palestinian Land Authority have provided aid agencies with some land to re-house families away from areas exposed to violence, mainly in parts of Tal es Sultan and Fukhari.<sup>18</sup>

A total of 232 new housing units have been built to accommodate homeless people in Rafah. Of these, UNRWA has constructed 173<sup>19</sup> and the Ministry of Housing has constructed 59. However, 30 of the

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<sup>13</sup> 2,931 individuals, 95 per cent of whom are refugees.

<sup>14</sup> 6 June, UNRWA figures.

<sup>15</sup> The maximum number of people accommodated in UNRWA transit centres following the incursions was 2,500. On 6 June, 539 people remained in the transit centres.

<sup>16</sup> If a house has been damaged on more than one occasion each incident is counted separately. This accounts for the high figure for repairs compared to the total figure of the number of damaged houses.

<sup>17</sup> UNRWA Supplementary Appeal for Rafah is available at <http://www.unrwa.org>.

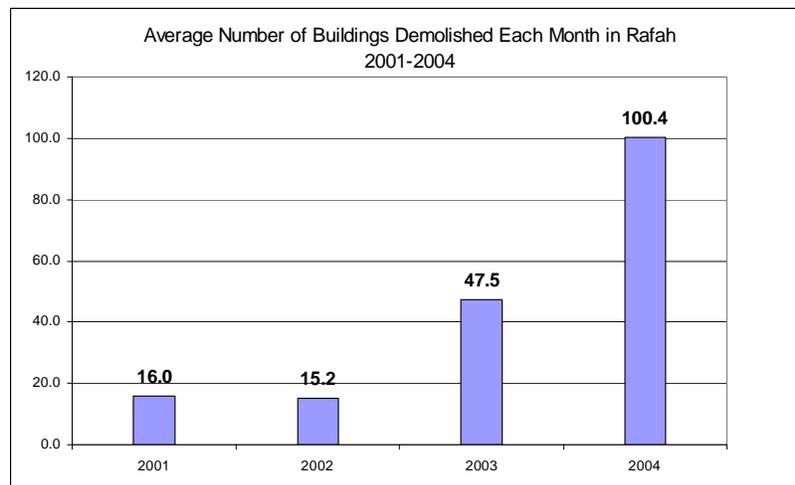
<sup>18</sup> UNRWA builds homes for affected refugee families.

<sup>19</sup> Houses are built by UNRWA using funding from donors. No rent is charged to refugees. Refugees are also permitted to build their own homes where land is available, but UNRWA has no figure showing how many refugees have been able to do this.

Ministry of Housing units were constructed in the Tal es Sultan area; these have not been occupied on account of their proximity to the IDF base in Rafiah Yam settlement.

A further 241 housing units are under construction by UNRWA, and another 20 are currently being built by the Ministry of Housing. UNRWA has a further 108 housing units under tender. UNDP is planning a \$1.5m project to re-house 60 non-refugee families.

UNRWA has spent, or is in the process of spending, \$12,106,474 on re-housing Palestinian families rendered homeless by Israeli military activities in Rafah. This figure includes infrastructure associated with the re-housing projects.



### C. Outstanding needs, implementation problems

- Slow-pace of rebuilding: Between September 2000 and 31 May 2004, 1,497 buildings were demolished and 2,899 families made homeless. 661 new housing units have been completed, are under construction, or are being planned by agencies. UNRWA estimates that if no further demolitions occur in Rafah, and if all current or planned housing schemes are completed, 1,691 of the refugee families eligible for UNRWA housing<sup>20</sup> will remain homeless unless funding and land is made available to re-house them.
- Saturation of rental and land space: Rental accommodation is in short supply in Rafah. Even when they can afford to pay rent, families are increasingly unable to find alternative accommodation as there is a shortage of space in areas not affected by the violence. Rafah was crowded even before Israel undertook the majority of home demolitions.<sup>21</sup>
- Donors have been unwilling to fund repair and rebuilding programmes.

## II. FOOD SECURITY

**A total of 109,254 people, or 66% of the population in Rafah is food insecure. Another 17% is in danger of becoming food insecure should the current conditions continue. Levels of food insecurity in Rafah have almost doubled in the past twelve months.**

<sup>20</sup> Among other criteria, UNRWA specifies that families must be refugees and must have no alternative housing in order to qualify for UNRWA re-housing programmes.

<sup>21</sup> "Camp inhabitants of different groups complain of overcrowding with large family size and small housing area. Houses in the camp are significantly smaller and worse in terms of lighting and ventilation than those in the city and villages. However, our observations during the research demonstrated that dwellings of rural population of Bedouin origin are not different than those in the camp in terms of small number of rooms, as well as walls and roofs in need for maintenance. The average number of people per room is 2 in the camp, 1.79 in the city and 2.03 in villages." See UNDP/MOPIC Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) Project Report on Rafah District, March 2002

## A. Needs

Before May 2004, Rafah was already one of the most food insecure areas in the occupied Palestinian territories. According to an assessment completed by the World Food Programme shortly before the incursions in May 2004, 66% of the population of Rafah – 109,254 people – is food insecure, compared with 39% in the Gaza Strip or 37% in the whole occupied Palestinian territories. In Rafah, a further 19% of the population is vulnerable to becoming food insecure should current conditions continue. Food insecurity in Rafah has risen by 31% since 2003.<sup>22</sup>

Food insecurity in Rafah is high partly because the area is particularly restricted by Israeli closure measures, and Palestinians living there are consequently isolated from sources of employment and income:

- Rafah has been badly affected by restrictions on agricultural trade and production. The two southern governorates, Khan Younis and Rafah, traditionally constituted the 'food basket' for the Gaza Strip. Before access restrictions were imposed, farmers imported necessary agricultural inputs from Egypt at a cheap price. They also exported the majority of their products to Israel or other countries. This trade in agricultural goods is no longer possible. The market prices of goods produced in the Rafah area has dropped below the cost of production, because farmers are all producing the same crops. This has made agriculture an unsustainable source of income for many farmers.<sup>23</sup>
- The leveling of agricultural lands adjacent to settlements or the Green Line has contributed to food insecurity in rural areas. Farmers have also been denied access to their fields by Israeli forces.<sup>24</sup>
- Movement is heavily restricted between parts of Rafah district, which limits access to markets and jobs. Al Mawasi, for example, is closed in by a security zone and a security fence with a checkpoint. Palestinians living in Tal es Sultan, Rafah and Al Bayuk have no access to the sea because they cannot enter Al Mawasi. Many Bedouin families are food insecure because they live near security or border zones, where restrictions prevent access to grazing for their animals.<sup>25</sup>

An additional factor is the high proportion of refugees in Rafah's population: 90% of the population are refugees, and poverty is higher among refugees than in the population as a whole. These factors contribute to the high levels of food insecurity reported by FAO and WFP in recent assessments.<sup>26</sup>

Acute food needs have been created by the round of house demolitions in May 2004. In addition to loss of their homes, families have also lost property including cooking equipment. Food insecurity is also likely to increase as a result of additional IDF damage to agricultural property. Crops on farm land east of Rafah were leveled, and green houses and irrigation systems were destroyed north west of Tal es Sultan. Citrus and olive trees were uprooted in areas where the IDF deployed their troops. In total, over 200 acres of agricultural land were damaged during the May incursions.

## B. Humanitarian assistance and response

### 1. Emergency distributions following May 2004 incursions

UNRWA made emergency food distributions, and WFP distributed 771,000 loaves of bread during the crisis in May. CARE International, Islamic Relief and other NGOs also distributed food parcels during the emergency period.

### 2. Ongoing humanitarian response: regular distributions of food aid

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<sup>22</sup> WFP food security assessment for oPt, 'pair wise' methodology, 2003 and 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Coping Strategies of WFP Beneficiaries in oPt, World Food Programme, March 2004.

<sup>24</sup> UNDP/MOPIC Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) Project Report on Rafah District, March 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Food Security Assessment West Bank and Gaza Strip, FAO/WFP, Rome 2003, p. 55.

<sup>26</sup> WFP food security assessment for oPt, 'pair wise' methodology, 2003 and 2004, Food Security Assessment West Bank and Gaza Strip, FAO/WFP, Rome 2003.

Of Rafah's population of 166,700, 149,370 receive food aid on a regular basis, constituting nearly 90% of the population. 16,500 families also receive cash assistance, to enhance their capacity to purchase food and other necessary goods.

The Governorate, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Palestinian Trade Unions, NGOs and charitable societies are also distributing food in Rafah. The Governorate has distributed 3,344 food parcels with funding from the Mercy Hearts Foundation, in addition to approximately 7,000 food parcels funded by the Spanish and the Italian governments between January 2003 and February 2004.

UNRWA and WFP food aid case load, Rafah, 2004<sup>27</sup>

	Hardship	Emergency	Homeless	Total
UNRWA	12,997	93,662	4,621	111,280
WFP	18,620	19,470	528	38,618

### C. Outstanding needs, implementation problems

- During short periods in May, ICRC, WFP and UNRWA staff were prevented from accessing warehouses by the presence of Israeli forces.
- The closure of Karni Terminal has been a persistent problem for agencies delivering food to the Gaza Strip, including Rafah.<sup>28</sup> Karni was closed between 11 and 30 May to all traffic except limited quantities of humanitarian assistance provided by UNRWA and WFP.<sup>29</sup> It has since reopened from 31 May, but with new security procedures that will probably limit the volume of goods entering and exiting Gaza. If the access point is not freed up for commercial traffic, the amount of foodstuffs brought to Rafah through the terminal will be reduced, and prices of imported goods are likely to rise.
- Due to funding shortfalls, UNRWA was only able to distribute five out of eight planned food rounds under the emergency programme in 2003, and therefore was only able to cover 40 per cent of the calorific needs of the population (2100 kcal per day) instead of 67 per cent as originally planned. WFP provided the full ration (2,100 kcal) to priority hardship social cases, but food deliveries to other groups have sometimes been delayed.
- Food insecurity in Rafah is likely to remain high while tight closure is maintained around the District, over the whole Gaza Strip, and while agricultural land continues to be lost to Israeli incursions and widening security zones around the settlements.

## III. HEALTH

**There are 3.3 hospital beds for every 10,000 people in Rafah – the Palestinian national average is 13.8 beds per 10,000. Access from Rafah to hospitals in Khan Younis was blocked for some days during incursions in May. Public health is deteriorating because of crowded and unsanitary living conditions.**

### A. Needs

The intense conflict has added to the burden placed on health services in southern Gaza, particularly UNRWA's three primary health care clinics.

<sup>27</sup> Hardship cases are chronically poor people, most of whom were living in poverty before the devastating economic decline of the past three years. Many emergency cases are 'new poor', who lost their jobs since September 2000. For more details regarding these classifications, see the Mid-Year Review of the oPt Consolidated Appeals Process, available at <http://www.reliefweb.int>. WFP emergency assistance is delivered to 1500 families in Rafah by the Ministry of Agriculture through Food for Work programmes. 20% of beneficiaries of this programme are women.

<sup>28</sup> In 2002, for example, Karni was closed almost completely for a period of six weeks, forcing the suspension of UNRWA's emergency food assistance programme.

<sup>29</sup> In order to reduce dependency on Karni, WFP had procured 4,708 metric tonnes of wheat flour locally.

In the immediate aftermath of the incursions, public health degenerated as a consequence of damage to water and sewage networks and overcrowded facilities. The Ministry of Health clinic in Tal es Sultan reported that between 1-17 May, 848 children – around 50 per day – were brought to the clinic suffering from ailments including diarrhoea and skin diseases. The clinic was then closed for three days. Between 22 and 31 May, when the clinic reopened, 1363 children – 151 per day – were brought to the clinic. The increased caseload is clearly a consequence of cramped, unsanitary conditions prevailing since the incursions.

## **B. Humanitarian Assistance and Response**

### **1. Emergency health care**

The health sector has largely coped with the immediate demands that have arisen in the wake of Israeli incursions. Over the past two years, the Ministry of Health and UNRWA have introduced a policy of decentralization to ensure a three month contingency reserve of medicines, consumables and equipment at their facilities. Although expensive, this has ensured that needs have been met in most instances where incursions have taken place and tight closure has been enforced.

NGOs, including CARE International, Medecins sans Frontieres, and Medecins du Monde delivered emergency health care and other forms of assistance to Rafah during the incursions.

### **2. Regular health care provision in Rafah**

Rafah has four principal health service providers: the Ministry of Health, UNRWA, national NGOs and the private sector. There are a total of nine Primary Health Care centres in Rafah. UNRWA has one 'Level 2' centre, which offers standard preventive and curative services, and two 'Level 4' centres with expanded services including dental care, gynecology and obstetrics, a laboratory, and radiology facilities. Three clinics operate 24 hour emergency services while another clinic operates 12 hour emergency services.

There is one hospital in Rafah, which serves as the first referral point for secondary health care services. The hospital has a total of 52 beds, or 3.3 beds per 10,000 persons. This is below the Palestinian national average of 13.8 beds per 10,000. Two of these beds are located in the hospital's Intensive Care Unit.

NGOs offer a range of services including provision of medicines and disposables, training and support of mobile clinics.

### **3. Coordination**

Two coordination bodies have been addressing health issues relating to the Rafah crises. At the central level, the World Health Organisation and the Ministry of Health co-chair a monthly Health Emergency Coordination Meeting. At the district level, the WHO together with other UN agencies and International NGOs supported Rafah health emergency committee through Rafah District Health Group. This group is coordinating the health sector in Rafah.

## **C. Outstanding needs, implementation problems**

- During 'Operation Rainbow', ambulance services were interrupted by Israeli forces and ambulances were sometimes unable to evacuate casualties from the Tal es Sultan area, even where prior co-ordination had been undertaken with the IDF. Israeli troops also prevented people from accessing UNRWA's health clinic in the area.
- When Rafah's An Najjar Hospital reaches capacity (52 beds, 30 doctors, 32 nurses) or when patients require specialist treatment, they must be referred to health care facilities in Khan Younis. Access to health care facilities in Khan Younis was denied during incursions. Ambulances were required to use alternative side routes to bypass the IDF tanks, located mainly at Morag/Sufa junction.

## **IV. INFRASTRUCTURE**

**The poor state of Rafah's infrastructure caused public health problems even before recent demolitions occurred. Additional damage during IDF incursions in May, to water and electricity lines, roads and public buildings compounds the problem.**

## A. Needs

Infrastructure in Rafah district was weak even before sustaining damage during military operations. In its 2002 Poverty Assessment, UNDP and the Ministry of Planning found that Rafah's public water supply network – which covers 85 per cent of the District's houses – was already “old, worn and polluted.” Water pollution caused approximately 70 per cent of common illnesses in the district.<sup>30</sup> The inadequate road and communications infrastructure in the district add to difficulties faced by rural communities in accessing markets, and contribute to rural poverty and unemployment.<sup>31</sup>

### Water

According to the Rafah Municipality preliminary assessment, 17km of the 30km of water network in Tal es Sultan was damaged during the May incursions, and 19km of the 25km network was damaged in Brasil and Salam. Figures for the sewage system show an even higher proportion of damage. Of the total sewage network of 20km in Tal es Sultan, 15km was damaged, while of the 15km of sewerage network for Brasil and Salam 12km was damaged.

The Palestinian Water Authority reports that while an increasing number of homes are now being reconnected to the networks, the availability of water is little more than three hours per day. Affected communities remain reliant on water tankers.

Between January 2003 and February 2004, up to 40% of the water network length was damaged during various incursions, and up to 35% of the sewage network was damaged in six different areas. The Municipality estimates that the cost of repairs of water pipes and installations destroyed during Israeli military activities amounts to approximately \$250,000 every six months.

### Electricity

Israeli military operations have caused extensive damage to the electricity network, cutting wires and cables, breaking electricity poles, destroying transformers and causing other damage. The Gaza Electrical Distribution Company (GEDCO) reports that electrical infrastructure destroyed during May – including pylons, insulators, transformers, cables and accessories – will cost \$150,005 to replace. Damage to electricity infrastructure has been a problem in Rafah for some time. The GEDCO transformer near Salah Ed Din gate in Rafah has been destroyed or damaged eight times since September 2000. Gaza Electricity Distribution Company estimates the replacement cost for equipment and materials damaged between 1 January 2003 and 30 April 2004 to be \$312,657.

**Roads** During each incursion roads were badly damaged. The NGO Community Habitat Finance (CHF), which has been supporting infrastructure projects in conjunction with the Rafah Municipality, calculates the repair cost to 16 of its projects from the May incursions at \$160,500. The majority of the damage has occurred to its road projects in Brasil (\$109,000).

**Public buildings** Military operations have also damaged schools, health centres and warehouses in Rafah. In May, the external wall of the pharmacy in the Ministry of Health clinic in Tal es Sultan was demolished. IDF vehicles broke through the gates and the outer boundary walls of the UNRWA Rafah Preparatory C Girls' School and Tal es Sultan Elementary Co-educational School, demolished the internal boundary wall separating the two schools, and caused major damage to the school yard pavements.

UNRWA estimates that, to May 2004, damage amounting to \$30,250 has occurred to its installations in Rafah. During the May incursions, an estimated \$10,000 of damage was inflicted on UNRWA schools.

## B. Humanitarian Assistance and Response

### 1. Emergency response to May 2004 incursions

#### Water and Sanitation

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<sup>30</sup> UNDP/MOPIC Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) Project Report on Rafah District, March 2002

<sup>31</sup> “All rural population groups agreed that the absence of road networks to tie rural areas together and with city is the reason why this area and its population are neglected by institutions and officials, reinforcing poverty, unemployment, ignorance and illness.” UNDP/MOPIC Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) Project Report on Rafah District, March 2002

In response to shortages of potable water, UNRWA distributed 10,000 litres of water to the residents of Tal es Sultan area on 21 May. The operation was coordinated with the ICRC, which facilitated access for Rafah Municipality water trucks, distributing 31,000 litres of water, and also supplied fuel for water pumps.

UNRWA also arranged for seven days of water and food supplies to be delivered to the SOS Orphanage in Tal Es-Sultan and supplied 3,000 litres of diesel fuel for Rafah Municipality water and sewage pumps in the area. On 22 May, UNRWA distributed an additional 1,500 litres of potable water in the eastern part of Tal Es-Sultan.

A number of NGOs and charitable organizations, including Oxfam, SCF-US, CARE and Islamic Relief also supplied bottled water and water engineers to assist with repairs.

Following the May incursions, "fast track" funding of \$100,000 was provided by USAID to a local contractor to repair water and sewage pipes and to replace the transformer at the Jumset Jabil pumping station. The ICRC has also agreed to allocate \$100,000 for the procurement of materials relating to the emergency repairs, out of which \$43,000 has already been made available to Rafah Municipality. ICRC has also committed itself to supply seven water tankers per day to Brasil and two per day to Tal es Sultan for a period of at least five weeks from the beginning of June.

### **Electricity**

The Gaza Electrical Distribution Company (GEDCO) reported on 7 June that electrical coverage has been restored to most areas of Rafah. Short term intermediate repairs have been carried out. However, these will not stand up to additional heavy incursions.

## **2. Ongoing Repair and rehabilitation**

### **Water and sanitation**

Rafah Municipality has carried out most of the water and sewage network repairs, with donor support from USAID, the Netherlands, Norway, CIDA and the World Bank.

**Electricity** Since January 2003, Gaza Electricity Distribution Company has repaired or replaced approximately 30% of the electrical facilities destroyed during Israeli incursions.

**Roads** The Municipality, with support from the NGO CHF International, has repeatedly re-paved roads and sidewalks. It has also repaired water connections which are integrated in the road network. UNDP is currently developing an \$810,000 programme for repair of damaged roads. This will be implemented with the Rafah village councils and Municipality.

**Public buildings** Between January 2003 and February 2004, UNRWA spent more than \$30,000 on repairs of public facilities such as schools and health centres.

## **C. Outstanding needs, implementation problems**

Due to the repeated incursions and ensuing destruction, there are few funds for upgrading and developing the existing networks. All available funds are channeled into immediate repair work, leaving no funds for long term infrastructure development. In numerous cases, the repairs are implemented as intermediate stop gap measures rather than complete repairs.

### **Electricity**

- GEDCO currently has very limited equipment and materials left in its central warehouse and reports that it is having to use second hand material found locally to cover ongoing repairs.
- GEDCO is a semi-governmental organization and is mainly reliant on income from utility bills. Rafah's residents have not been paying utility bills, because household disposable income has declined substantially since September 2000. As provider of essential services to homes, schools and hospitals GEDCO has not cut off supplies. It currently relies on bank loans to cope with this fall in revenue, although it has also some funds from the Government of Norway. GEDCO has not received assistance from the PA. GEDCO states that in the last three and a half years, it has accumulated NIS 700 million in losses on account of non-payment of bills.

## **Water and sanitation**

- Maintenance and repairs of the sewage and waste water system have frequently been prevented because of security problems.
- While progress has been made in restoring the water network since the May incursions, restoration of the sewage system has been slow. This is in part due to the wider diameter of sewage pipes, which means that they are more expensive to repair and there are insufficient numbers in Gaza given the recent problems of access at Karni. The water aquifer in Rafah is relatively close to the ground surface, and there is a risk that sewage might sink into the water supply.

## **V. PSYCHO-SOCIAL**

### **A. Needs**

Quantifying needs in the psycho-social sector is difficult. First, the needs are not immediately apparent and may take weeks or months to develop. Second, there is a lack of qualified and trained professionals in the area to conduct such an assessment.

However, given the large scale destruction, displacement and violence, the psycho-social sector is of extreme importance and essential for the long-term well-being and rehabilitation of the community.

### **B. Humanitarian Assistance and Response**

UN agencies, the Palestinian Ministry of Health and national and international NGOs provide psycho-social assistance in the Gaza Strip, including Rafah. Activities in this sector are undertaken on two levels: prevention and crisis intervention.

**i. Prevention:** These activities focus on capacity building, and aim to increase the community's ability to cope with stress and trauma. Prevention activities mainly been implemented by the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) in conjunction with UNICEF and local partners. The GCMHP has established a two-year post graduate diploma at the Islamic University in community mental health and human rights that is currently attended by 31 students. Similar capacity building programmes are currently offered to 20 midwives and 22 employees from health related NGOs. GCMHP has also trained 22 professionals to provide counseling over the telephone.

UNICEF has conducted public awareness campaigns for service providers dealing with children in crisis, and provided parents and teachers with training on how to deal with children suffering such affects. These programmes have been implemented through the Palestinian Centre for the Resolution of Community Disputes (PCRCD).

UNRWA has also undertaken activities to raise awareness of the mental health problems associated with stress and trauma, and provides conflict resolution programmes in Agency schools. UNRWA also trains counselors in psycho-social support.

The Ministry of Health has initiated a capacity building programme in mental health, and will soon start offering a diploma in mental health for general doctors and nurses in working in primary health care centres.

**ii. Crisis Intervention:** These activities aim to support individuals by providing psycho-social assistance following crises. UNRWA has 13 counselors working in its schools in Rafah. These counselors provide individual and group counseling sessions, debriefings and classroom-based intervention. To date, 11,673 children and 45 families have benefited from such counseling. UNRWA also has two counselors working at its health centres, and a further two at its Relief department. They also offer individual and group sessions that have reached 8,596 women and 4,165 men. 654 home visits have taken place. 120 cases have been referred.

The GCMHP provides psychological support through debriefings after crisis – it has undertaken 1,488 home visits, and also provides hospital sessions to counsel the injured. GCMHP also has two counselors who provide telephone counseling. This service has been established in recognition that in a conservative

society such as Gaza, men in particular may not wish to be publicly seen accepting psychological support. GCMHP has also conducted 606 public meetings to raise public awareness of the effects of stress and trauma.

There is currently no Ministry of Health capacity to treat psycho-social cases in Rafah. Cases are currently referred to hospitals in Khan Younis, where there is a community mental health department within the Ministry of Health that deals with such cases. However, the World Health Organisation, supported by Italian Cooperation, is building a community mental health centre in Tal es Sultan – this will be completed within the next three months. WHO is also supporting a project to provide eight beds in Al Nasar hospital in Khan Younis for patients with mental health problems.

International NGOs also support the psycho-social sector. Medecins Sans Frontiers operates a mobile clinic to treat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression and severe anxiety. Other agencies including CRIC, World Vision, CHF International and UNICEF have established safe play areas aimed at promoting recreational activities for children. They also rehabilitate kindergartens and clubs.

### **C. Outstanding needs, implementation problems**

- There is a need for proper assessment of the acute and recognized problem of stress and trauma in the community. Medecins sans Frontieres, which is active in this sector, is “very concerned about the mental health status of the Rafah population and about the future impact for the adults and especially the children.”
- The number of locally trained professionals required to assess needs and provide intervention is insufficient.
- Funding from donors has been particularly short in this sector.

## **SUSTAINABILITY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE**

Public health risks, food insecurity and degradation of infrastructure are becoming increasingly severe problems for the people of Rafah. However, homelessness is the most pressing humanitarian issue. Agencies have built, or are currently planning to build, a total of 661 housing units in Rafah. Even if no further demolitions occur, this number of housing units is far below that needed to accommodate the 2,899 families made homeless since September 2000.

Options for the short term re-housing of homeless families are increasingly limited as demolitions continue. UNRWA currently provides rental support to help such families, including those made homeless in May. Rental support is not a sustainable solution, however. Before the extensive demolitions of the past 18 months, conditions were already crowded in Rafah.<sup>32</sup> The rental market is now saturated. Three weeks after their homes were demolished over 500 persons for whom rental subsidies are available have still been unable to find homes to rent, and are sleeping on mattresses in schoolrooms.

If these people do eventually find accommodation to rent, they are likely to have to move into very confined spaces. They may split up for long periods, with some family members moving into rented accommodation and others into housing with relatives. This can lead to a variety of social problems. If rented rooms cannot be found, some of those made homeless may have to move into tent accommodation.

An option for addressing the problem of homelessness is to increase the current home construction programme. This is costly: approximately \$20,000 is required for each housing unit, and 2,899 families have lost their homes. Approximately 661 families have been, or will be, re-housed in current PA or agency schemes. If all the remaining homeless families were to be re-housed, the cost would be approximately \$44,760,000.<sup>33</sup> UNRWA estimates the unfunded shortfall for re-housing eligible refugee families alone to be \$35,055,272.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> UNDP/MOPIC Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) Project Report on Rafah District, March 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Not all families are eligible for housing assistance. Agencies' criteria for judging eligibility vary; but generally if families have alternative means of accommodation they are deemed ineligible. However, the vast majority of the families affected by house

Home construction or reconstruction poses additional dilemmas. Construction of new housing units takes some time: only 232 new homes have been completed since 2000, and agencies do not currently have the resources, in terms of available funds or land, to speed up the construction process. Furthermore, rebuilding on original plots is not considered feasible while the risk of demolition remains. Finding new plots in the Rafah area is difficult, because space is limited. Moving families to new homes outside the Rafah area – where land is also in short supply – adds to the stress that families have already experienced when their homes were destroyed. Families move away from relations, lose access to sources of employment and must enroll children in different schools.

## **CONCLUSION**

The problem of homelessness in Rafah affects the whole community. Families who must now accommodate their friends or relations are placed under heavy strain. Those living in the area near to the 'buffer zone' are under constant threat of home demolition. Education is disrupted while school buildings are housing the homeless.

In this context, Israel's apparent escalation of its demolition operation in Rafah is a source of grave concern to humanitarian agencies. During 2002, an average of 15 homes were destroyed or damaged beyond repair every month in Rafah. In 2003, the rate of home demolition increased to an average of more than 47 homes a month. So far this year, Israel has demolished an average 100 homes per month in Rafah.

The demolition in May was the most extensive yet experienced by Rafah's residents. Donors and agencies must consider carefully how to deal with the humanitarian consequences if Israel continues to pursue this policy of home demolition.

With short term accommodation currently saturated in Rafah, the alternative for housing homeless families is either in school buildings or tent villages. The latter option risks more severe sanitation and health problems and community dislocation.

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demolitions have few resources, and rely on assistance from agencies. UNRWA found that of 2,331 refugee families made homeless since September 2000, 2,251 – over 96% - had no alternative accommodation and were hence eligible for re-housing.

<sup>34</sup> 173 housing units have already been completed, work on another 241 units (263 families/1331 persons) is underway and another 108 units (116 families/670 persons) are soon to be tendered (i.e. funding is available). That leaves an unfunded shortfall for eligible refugees of 1,566 units for 1,691 families/9,301 persons, at an estimated total cost (including infrastructure) of USD35,055,272 or USD20,730 per family to be re-housed.

## ***Annex A: Selected United Nations statements regarding the situation in Rafah, May 2004***

### **United Nations Security Council**

On 19 May 2004, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1544 expressing grave concern about “the recent demolition of homes committed by Israel, the occupying Power, in the Rafah refugee camp.” In UNSCR 1544, the Security Council “calls on Israel to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law, and insists, in particular, on its obligation not to undertake demolition of homes contrary to that law”. It further “Calls for the cessation of violence and for respect of and adherence to legal obligations, including those under international humanitarian law”.

### **Statements by the Spokesman for the Secretary-General**

19 May 2004: “The Secretary-General strongly condemns the killing and injury of Palestinian demonstrators in southern Gaza today. He calls on Israel to immediately halt the military operations. The killing of peaceful demonstrators, many of them women and children, has distressed the Secretary-General, who sends his deepest condolences and sympathies to the families of the victims. The Secretary-General has repeatedly warned Israel, including yesterday via his Middle East envoy, that it must abide by its obligations as an occupying power, which include protecting the civilian population and eschewing the disproportionate or indiscriminate use of force.”

17 May 2004: “The Secretary-General reiterates his condemnation of Israel’s widespread destruction of Palestinian homes in Rafah in the Gaza Strip. Recent reports from UN agencies assert that some 2,197 people have lost their homes in the first 15 days of May. In addition, there are reports of Israeli military plans for a more extensive round of house demolitions in Gaza. He repeats his call on the Government of Israel to fulfil its obligations under international law as it acts to ensure its security. As the occupying power, it must cease such acts of collective punishment immediately, and to refrain from further grave violations of international law.”

14 May 2004: “The Secretary-General strongly condemns Israel’s ongoing and widespread destruction of Palestinian homes in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. Reports cite the demolition of scores of buildings over the last two days, in addition to 130 residential buildings already destroyed this month. The Secretary-General has repeatedly called on the Government of Israel to address its security needs within the boundaries of international law. He urges Israel to uphold its obligations as an occupying power by immediately halting such actions, which are tantamount to collective punishment and a clear violation of international law.”

### **United Nations Special Co-ordinator for the Middle East Peace Process**

18 May 2004 – “Terje Roed-Larsen, the Secretary-General’s Middle East Envoy, is very alarmed by the death and destruction wrought by the ongoing Israeli military operation in the southern Gaza Strip. Reports say that among the mounting casualty count are many civilians and some children under 16. Mr. Roed-Larsen calls on Israel, as the occupying power, to act under the framework of international law, most critically in the protection of the civilian population. He reminds the Government of Israel that it has the responsibility to give free access to humanitarian workers – and that if the fighting escalates, which will further endanger civilians, it must also allow for search and rescue operations.”

### **UNRWA**

16 May 2004: Peter Hansen, UNRWA Commissioner-General, stated that “We are extremely alarmed that even more demolitions are planned. Already huge swathes of Rafah have been flattened, to the extent that some families have experienced the trauma of demolition more than once. With these disproportionate military operations, Israel is in grave breach of international humanitarian law. This collective punishment can do nothing to calm the situation in Gaza or enhance Israel’s own security.”

## ***Annex B: Agencies contributing to the Rafah Needs Assessment***

1. American Near East refugee Aid (ANERA)
2. CARE International
3. Community Habitat Finance (CHF)
4. Comitato Internazionale Per Sviluppo Dei Popoli (CISP)
5. Centro Regionale d'Intervento per la Cooperazione (CRIC)
6. Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP)
7. Gaza Electrical Distribution Company (GEDCO)
8. Health Work Committees (HWC)
9. Islamic Relief
10. Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP-UK)
11. Medecins du Monde (France)
12. Medecins Sans Frontiers (France-Spain)
13. Medecins Sans Frontiers (Greece)
14. Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA)
15. Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC)
16. Palestinian Water Authority (PWA)
17. Rafah Municipality
18. Salah Islamic Society
19. Save the Children (US)
20. United Nations Development Programme
21. UNICEF
22. UNRWA
23. Welfare Society
24. World Food Programme
25. World Health Organisation
26. World Vision

Details of organisations' projects in Rafah are available at <http://www.ochaopt.org>.

## ***Annex C: Reference Map of Rafah***

This will be available at <http://www.ochaopt.org> from 23 June 2004.

***Annex D: Satellite images showing Rafah before and after Israeli military incursions in May***

These will be available at <http://www.ochaopt.org> from 23 June 2004.