



UNICEF statement on situation in Gaza

***Attributable to Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa
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The humanitarian crisis caused by the current violence in Gaza is hitting children and women the most. Children form over half of Gaza's population of nearly 1.5 million and are bearing the brunt of the conflict. Being the most vulnerable part of the population, children are the first to be psychologically distressed, the most in need of medical support and the most exposed to injuries among civilians in times of conflict.

As of 3 January 2009, 70 Palestinian children were killed and at least 650 injured, out of a tally of 550 deaths and 2800 injuries, according to data provided by the Palestinian Ministry of Health. UNOCHA estimates that 25 per cent of casualties in Gaza are civilians. Among the Israeli fatalities reported are four civilians. Over 20 have been injured. A school has also been hit in Southern Israel.

Gaza has been facing an 18-month long blockade which has resulted in the destruction of livelihoods and a significant deterioration of infrastructure and basic services.

This is unacceptable.

The number of children in Gaza affected by the loss of a parent, damage to their home, displacement, lack of needed medical equipment and treatment and the interruption of their education is yet to be fully measured. But it is significant.

The children in Gaza are currently deprived not only of the basic human rights any human being should enjoy but are also denied the fundamental rights specific to children, to which the signatories of the Convention of the Right of the Child are duty bound. These include the right of children to be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence and injury, and the right to education, development and access to healthcare services.

The intensity of the current violence renders impossible any action to relieve their plight.

UNICEF reiterates its call for an immediate end to the violence and to allow humanitarian aid and relief efforts to be fully deployed.

UNICEF urges all parties to the conflict to abide by International Humanitarian Law to ensure that children are protected and receive essential humanitarian supplies and support.

Children should never be the silent victims and unheard voices of a conflict. Their long suffering must end.

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