

Perlis State Rugby Association - Cheque Presentation Ceremony In Support of Gaza Crisis

Sunday, 11 January 2009 • Astaka SMK Syed Sirajuddin Arau, Perlis School.
Held In Conjunction With The Perlis Sevens 09 Rugby Tournament

SPEECH BY

Mr. Youssouf Oomar
UNICEF Malaysia Representative

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon, Selamat Sejahtera kepada semua.

Life in the Midst of the Gaza Conflict

Today I am here as a member of the UN family, to share with you the extent of the humanitarian crisis that is in Gaza.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sixteen days of aerial bombing on Gaza has caused extensive devastation throughout the territory and is threatening the health and welfare of millions of children.

As the world watches the Gaza bloodshed in horror, appalled at how the crisis is spiralling further out of control, one thing is clear, that this situation has now become a global humanitarian crisis. Conditions for parents and children in Gaza have become far too dangerous and frightening.

According to the Gaza Health Sector Group more than 70 children are now dead and close to 600 injured following the consecutive days of air strikes.

Many people have fled their homes, seeking shelter with friends, relatives or in schools.

Many families are sleeping in the cold because their houses have been totally destroyed.

Parents say children have had very little sleep and they show the common signs of trauma including severe anxiety, bed wetting, loss of appetite and general malaise.

In an interview with UNICEF, sixteen-year-old Baha a young boy living in Gaza said that he has lived with 16 other members of his family in the basement of his Gaza City home since the bombing began.

"I'm trying to stay alive," he says. "There's no electricity, and as a result of that there is no safe water to drink. "Everybody feels scared. Everyone is moving from his house because he's afraid that his house will be hit from the air or from the land or from the sea."

Young Baha was in the middle of an Arabic exam when the Israeli campaign began. "We won't have school for at least two weeks" he said sadly.

Children are Bearing the Brunt of the Conflict

Ladies and gentlemen,

Children constitute more than half the population of Gaza and they are bearing the brunt of this crisis. They are already suffering severely. Most of these children, have dealt with more trauma than any of us will ever experience in an entire lifetime.

Because children are particularly vulnerable in situations of armed conflict, this crisis has robbed them of their basic rights to life, liberty and freedom. Their access to humanitarian aid, basic services, education, and medical assistance has been severely hampered.

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights reports that a number of children were killed and wounded while on their way to or back from schools, and hundreds of school children and civilians were treated for shock.

Children in Gaza are most in need of protection, psychological assistance and medical support. The number of children 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.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our humanity is incomplete when children, irrespective of nationality, are victims of military operations.

It is critical that humanitarian assistance, including food, medical supplies and equipment be allowed into Gaza to address the urgent needs of children and women.

Help Needed More Than Ever

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.

Hospitals are overwhelmed by casualties and are running low on medicines.

Over a million Gazans, do not have electricity. Lack of electricity and shortage of fuel are constraining households from heating water for purification. According to the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility around 800,000 people in North Gaza, Gaza and Middle Area have no running water.

Furthermore, sanitation services, including solid waste removal, have been discontinued due to the ongoing fighting.

Currently only nine bakeries remain open throughout Gaza, with limited supplies that are rationed to households. The bakeries have not received wheat flour since the beginning of the ground operation and prices have doubled in some areas and there is a lack of cash with which to buy any available food.

Shortages of cooking gas and other fuel are constraining households from cooking food.

In addition, reports state that only 3 out of 56 primary health care clinics are currently open due to the fighting. Hospitals are struggling to function, with the availability of fuel – needed to keep generators running – at precariously low levels.

UNICEF Reaches Out To Gaza

In an effort to reduce the suffering faced by children in Gaza, UNICEF is delivering urgent supplies of food, fuel and medicine to Gaza hospitals.

Since 3 January, UNICEF has provided First Aid kits, resuscitation kits, and transported into Gaza five additional emergency medical kits, each meeting the needs of 10,000 people over three months. UNICEF is working closely with partners to stockpile drugs and supplies to meet the needs in coming months and to move them to the affected area. Supplies ranging from family hygiene kits, water purification tablets and emergency education material are already on route from UNICEF country offices in the region.

UNICEF is also working with child protection partners to produce and broadcast radio and television messages designed to help parents keep their children as safe as possible and to enable them to identify and manage symptoms of distress.

A Tribute To The Perak State Rugby Association

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Whilst in the past few days, the cease-fire has allowed for UNICEF to distribute some supplies to civilians affected by the ongoing conflict.

Still, much more aid is needed to meet the urgent needs of children at risk. I would like to therefore thank Persatuan Ragbi Negeri Perlis for taking this step in reminding us that much more needs to be done for the children of Gaza. The organisation's pro-activeness in supporting UNICEF to raise funds for the crisis through the collaboration with members of the Rugby Association of Perlis, the Perlis State Government, school students and members of the Perlis public is truly commendable.

To everyone who has dug deep into their pockets – I am honoured to have been in your presence or received your hard-earned money on behalf of the Gaza children.

The next step now is for us to reach the rest of the Malaysian public and urge them to come forward and do their part. I know that the current credit crunch as well as rising food and consumer goods have hit us hard. But here is a cause where every sen donated will be completely worthwhile, where every ringgit contributed will save Gaza's children.

An Opportunity To Make Things Better

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone, every child has the right to life, liberty and security. Over the past 41 years, the children of Gaza have been living under occupation. Over the past 18 months, they have been living under siege. And for the past 10 days, the children of Gaza have been subject to a cruel and continuous military attack. The children in Gaza are 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.

Our humanity is incomplete when children, irrespective of nationality, are victims of military operations. Children should never be the silent victims and unheard voices of a conflict

2009 is a year that things can be different. As we face this crisis, and the possibilities of a new year, it's time for us to demand a ceasefire and work together to finally put an end to this cycle of violence. **Thank you.**