



Press Statement

UN and International Agencies Fear Gaza Educational System Unprepared for new school year

Call for immediate opening of Gaza's borders

28 July 2009

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator, representing UN aid agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), and the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), represented by at least 25 NGOs, today demand full and unfettered access into and out of Gaza in particular to restore the Gazan educational system.

During the 23 days of Israel's operation "Cast Lead" in Gaza, 18 schools were completely destroyed and at least 280 were damaged. Today, one month before the start of the new school year, more than six months after the ceasefires, none of these schools have been properly rebuilt or rehabilitated due to lack of construction materials. Since the imposition of the blockade, students have faced chronic shortages of educational supplies including textbooks, paper and uniforms, though we acknowledge the recent moves to allow textbooks, uniforms, and stationary into Gaza. These are welcome first steps. However, the quantities, kinds and predictability of goods being permitted into Gaza are still far below what is required for normal life. Even prior to "Cast Lead" the education system was already under severe duress due to the two year blockade that has caused a crisis of "human dignity" in Gaza.

The right to learn and be educated is a fundamental child right that is uniquely central to every child's ability to realize his or her potential - and by extension, that of their communities and countries. In the context of protracted conflict and occupation, safe schools also offer an unparalleled means of restoring a sense of normalcy and hope for children and their families. Despite the extraordinary odds stacked against them, going to school and becoming educated remains the single most cherished priority among Palestinian children. The continuing blockade on Gaza jeopardizes this fundamental child right, along with the remarkable progress in education that has been achieved thus far.

"The blockade has caused untold suffering to children in Gaza, who face another academic year in terrible conditions", said Philippe Lazzarini, acting Humanitarian Coordinator of oPt.

Together with the communities we serve, the United Nations and non-governmental humanitarian organizations working in oPt collectively call for immediate steps to end the blockade, as is required by international humanitarian and human rights law. We call on

the Government of Israel to urgently facilitate entry of construction materials and supplies for schools in the coming weeks, and to ensure that students, teachers and trainers can freely exit and enter Gaza to continue learning.

Ensuring access to education is an obligation of all governments, its primacy proclaimed by agreements ranging from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Education is also the heart of all development and the essential prerequisite for equality, dignity, and lasting peace. The future belongs to this generation of children and adolescents, and that future is inextricably rooted in the quality of education that they receive today.

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