

**WASH Gaza blockade press briefing**  
**Beit Lahiya waste water treatment facility**  
**UNICEF-oPt Special Representative Jean Gough**  
**3 September 2009**

You have heard from colleagues about the impact of the blockade and “Cast Lead” on Gaza’s water and sanitation infrastructure and how this has reduced the water utility’s ability to provide continuous services.

Safe water and sanitation are the foundation of a healthy childhood. When this infrastructure is degraded, so too are the other essential services that are critical to children’s survival and development, such as health and education.

Last month, schools re-opened for a third academic year under blockade. The Ministry of Education has said that almost 100 governmental schools now require urgent repairs to their water and sanitation facilities but that the Ministry cannot undertake this work due to the ban on construction materials into Gaza.

The combination of this degraded infrastructure, along with the water utility’s inability to provide continuous access to safe water means that many of Gaza’s 440,000 students are not learning in clean and healthy environments, and that they are unable to practice the basic but lifesaving hygiene measures that prevent the spread of disease in contained environments.

Safe water, sanitation and proper hygiene are a child’s primary protection against preventable sickness and death. Around the world, diarrhoea alone kills more than 4,000 children every day, representing the second biggest cause of death among children below five years old. Here in Gaza, it is behind 12 percent of young deaths. It is also an immediate cause of undernutrition for millions more children, which can have lasting impact on a child’s cognitive and physical development.

Diarrhoea is also preventable. Proper handwashing can reduce child diarrhoeal deaths by more than 40 percent; hygienic toilets can reduce them by an additional 32 percent. Proper handwashing also significantly reduces the incidence of other major child killers, notably pneumonia and other respiratory

infections, which is responsible for more than one in five child deaths in oPt, as well as swine influenza.

This basic right to water and sanitation is denied to children in Gaza. This is why today we join hands to highlight the crisis facing water and sanitation systems and services here. Only by lifting the ban against the entry of construction materials such as pipes, cement, pumps and electrical equipment can we turn this crisis around. For the duty bearers inside of Gaza and outside, this is not a matter of choice, but of obligation.