



UNRWA

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UNRWA CONDEMNS A WEEK OF ISRAELI HOUSE DEMOLITIONS IN RAFAH

Gaza –

A series of Israeli military incursions into the Palestinian-controlled areas of Gaza since 16 January has left 584 people homeless in the town and refugee camp of Rafah in the south of the strip. The fresh demolitions, carried out by Israeli military bulldozers, have added to the severe humanitarian crisis in Rafah, where a total of 9,970 people have now lost their homes since October 2000. In the Gaza Strip as a whole 14,852 people have been made homeless by Israeli actions since the start of the strife.

The current wave of incursions began on 16 January when 17 buildings, home to 170 people, were demolished. In the night and morning of 20 January a fresh assault saw a further 36 homes destroyed, leaving 414 people homeless. At 05:00 local time on 22 January a third incursion ended, leaving behind another four demolished homes. The total, for the whole of January so far, is 72 buildings demolished in Rafah.

The latest assault saw a 31-year old Palestinian woman killed and eight others injured.

The demolitions have hit both refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and non-refugee Palestinians. UNRWA relief teams, in conjunction with the ICRC and other organisations, are providing assistance with shelter, blankets, food and water to all of the homeless.

Peter Hansen, Commissioner General of UNRWA, condemned the latest demolitions: "Any humanitarian looking at the sheer number of innocent civilians who have lost their homes can only condemn Israel's house demolition policy as a hugely disproportionate military response by an occupation army. The nearly 15,000 people whose homes and possessions have been ground into the sand by Israel's bulldozers can hardly be blamed if they have come to believe that they are the victims of collective punishment. It is a policy that creates only hardship and bitterness, and in the end can only undermine hope for future reconciliation and peace."

UNRWA has issued an appeal to the international donor community for funds to allow it to build new shelters for homeless refugees in Gaza. Before the latest round of demolitions UNRWA estimated that it would cost US\$25 million to re-house all the refugees who have lost their homes. UNRWA has built 288 replacement shelters in Gaza and has a further 411 in various stages of design and construction.

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