



UNRWA

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UNRWA Recommences Emergency Food Distributions in the Gaza Strip

Gaza – The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees today recommenced the distribution of emergency food aid to some 600,000 refugees in the Gaza Strip.

UNRWA's emergency food programme was suspended on April 1 following restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities at the sole commercial entry point for Gaza. Those restrictions prevented UNRWA from transporting empty freight containers out of Gaza, causing the Agency a bottleneck that prevented 11,000 tons of food from entering from the Israeli port of Ashdod and costing UNRWA around \$130,000 in fees.

For most of the last two weeks, the Israeli authorities have operated workable arrangements - as is required under international humanitarian law - at the Gaza entry point. These have permitted the Agency to bring sufficient amounts of humanitarian aid into the Strip. The Agency now has enough food in Gaza to provide for the needs of the refugees for the next 30 days.

However, the future of the emergency food assistance programme remains in doubt because the Israeli authorities are now insisting that holes must be drilled in the two-inch wall cavities of containers leaving Gaza so that they can be searched by mini-camera. The containers are not the property of UNRWA and such procedures will add to the costs and the delays in providing food to the needy.

UNRWA delivers around 250 tons of food aid per day to the refugees in Gaza as part of a wider programme of emergency operations. These operations are designed to alleviate the worst of the economic hardship felt by the refugees since the start of the strife in the West Bank and Gaza in September 2000. Around two-thirds of the population of the Gaza Strip, 80 per cent of whom are refugees, are now living below the poverty line and are increasingly dependent on international humanitarian assistance.

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