



UNRWA

Press Release

Press Release No. HQ/G/10/2004

16 May, 2004

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UNRWA: ALARM AT PLANNED DEMOLITIONS

Gaza – The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) has issued a call to the Israeli military to halt its demolition operations in Rafah in the Gaza Strip where 12,600 people are now homeless.

UNRWA has opened a school to house the latest victims of the destruction and is distributing tents, food, water, kitchen kits, mattresses and blankets. The Agency estimates that it will now cost \$32 million to re-house the 18,382 people who have lost their homes across the Gaza Strip.

Peter Hansen, UNRWA's Commissioner-General, said: "In recent days the intensity of demolitions has seen a dramatic increase in the numbers of lost buildings in Gaza. Now UNRWA has the job of dealing with the human tragedy behind each demolition – the distressed children in its schools, the homeless families in need of basics like blankets, food and water, and the communities shaken by the stress of ceaseless conflict."

He added: "We are extremely alarmed that even more demolitions are planned. Already huge swathes of Rafah have been flattened, to the extent that some families have experienced the trauma of demolition more than once. With these disproportionate military operations, Israel is in grave breach of international humanitarian law. This collective punishment can do nothing to calm the situation in Gaza or enhance Israel's own security."

According to UNRWA's relief teams, so far in May, 2,197 people have been made homeless following the demolition of 191 homes throughout the Strip. The worst affected area is Rafah, where 1,064 newly homeless people were added in two days to the more than 11,000 who had already lost their homes since the start of the intifada.

In Gaza as a whole 2,018 buildings have been demolished or damaged beyond repair. Poignantly, on the day after Palestinians marked the anniversary of their original dispossession in 1948, UNRWA has established that 85 per cent of those made homeless are registered Palestine refugees.

UNRWA has so far built 288 new housing units for 301 refugee families in the Gaza Strip. A further 310 units are under construction and 356 are being planned. However, UNRWA is facing severe underfunding of its Emergency Appeal for the occupied Palestinian territory in 2004 and is unlikely to receive all the resources it needs to meet the needs of the homeless. Already many thousands of people have waited more than two years for the Agency to provide them with new, permanent shelter.

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