



UNRWA

PRESS RELEASE

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NEW SHELTERS FOR GAZA HOMELESS

Gaza

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) today handed over 86 new homes to refugee families from Rafah and Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip whose shelters have been destroyed by Israeli forces.

The new shelters, which will house 93 families, or 475 refugees, are the concrete expression of UNRWA's pledge to re-house all those refugees whose homes have been destroyed in the strife and who have no alternative accommodation. According to the Agency's figures, by 10 May 2004 a total of 2,018 buildings, home to over 18,300 refugee and non-refugee Palestinians, had been destroyed or damaged beyond repair in the Gaza Strip since the start of the conflict in 2000.

Homeless families waiting for their new homes have already been provided with emergency assistance from UNRWA, in the form of tents, blankets, mats, kitchen utensils and food parcels. The Agency has also distributed emergency grants to cover some rental expenses. The construction project itself has also served to alleviate some of the hardships being felt in Gaza. It provided temporary employment for labourers, builders, and tradesmen at a time when unemployment is exceptionally high.

The homes opened today are the third phase of the Khan Younis re-housing project. The total cost of the project, including infrastructure work, has been approximately \$4.6 million. The three phases have provided 220 families with new homes. In total, in Gaza UNRWA has invested around \$20 million in re-housing the victims of demolition operations. The funds have been supplied by donors to UNRWA's Emergency Appeals for the occupied Palestinian territory. However future re-housing projects are in doubt as UNRWA has requested \$193.5 million to meet the needs of the refugees in 2004 and so far only \$55 million, 29 per cent, has been pledged by donors. UNRWA estimates that it will need an additional \$35 million to house all of those who are still currently homeless in Gaza.

The project was completed on time thanks to the willingness of the project's Palestinian builders to work extra hours when the site was accessible to make up for the many lost work days when closures prevented staff and materials from reaching the site.

In total in the Gaza Strip 374 new houses have now been built and 241 are currently under construction and 201 are at the design stage.

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