



# UNRWA

## PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **UNRWA DEMANDS APOLOGY AND RETRACTION FOR “BASELESS CHARGES” AGAINST UNRWA AMBULANCE DRIVERS**

Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) has today demanded an apology and retraction from the Israeli Government and Military for the damaging and baseless allegations they have made against UNRWA's ambulance drivers in the Gaza Strip.

On 14 May 2004, Shaul Mofaz, the Israeli Minister of Defence alleged that a UN ambulance had transported body parts of Israeli soldiers. In a letter dated 16 May (but only faxed to UNRWA on 24 May), Major General Yossef Mishlev, Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), claimed that a video tape showed Palestinian use on 11 May “...of ambulances belonging to UNRWA, apparently for the purpose of transporting body parts ....”

In letters to the Israeli Minister of Defence and to General Mishlev, Mr Hansen states that despite repeated requests from UNRWA, no evidence of UNRWA ambulance drivers transporting the body parts of Israeli soldiers has been presented by the Government of Israel. Accordingly, he has no reason to believe that there is any truth at all to the extremely unfortunate accusation being made against UNRWA.

Major General Mishlev's letter also claimed that UNRWA had been “concealing” the video tape of an UNRWA ambulance in Zeitun in Gaza City from 11 May. In fact UNRWA only received a copy of the video tape footage on 24 May, *after* having receiving General Mishlev's letter.

Moreover, the video tape shows absolutely no evidence of the transportation of soldiers' body parts and in no way undermines the statement issued by UNRWA on 13 May requesting that the neutrality of its ambulance be respected. The statement was released in response to an incident in which an ambulance driver's life was threatened by armed men who demanded that he transport them, along with their wounded comrade, to hospital. UNRWA forbids the transportation of armed fighters in its vehicles, but does not demand that its unarmed staff put their lives at risk.

Mr Hansen writes in his letter to General Mishlev: “You have urged me “to do all that can be done to publicize the truth regarding this sad episode”. I cannot help but note that UNRWA made a public announcement of the truth of the matter in its press release of 13 May 2004, before various Israeli authorities began making their false allegations. UNRWA's press release did not contain a discussion of UNRWA ambulances transporting body parts of Israeli soldiers because there was no evidence that such an event had occurred. In contrast, by making the baseless charge regarding body parts, your letter and the reported comments of the Minister of Defense have shown no such concern for evidentiary support. I urge you, the Minister of Defense and all others who have repeated this unsupported canard regarding body parts, to issue an immediate retraction and apology for making such a wholly unsupported accusation.”

-Ends-

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