



UNRWA

PRESS RELEASE

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VANESSA REDGRAVE MAKES HUMANITARIAN APPEAL FOR GAZA AND THE WEST BANK

JERUSALEM – The actress and human rights activist Vanessa Redgrave has made an appeal to the international community to increase its emergency humanitarian assistance to Palestinians suffering in the occupied Palestinian territory and to the Government of Israel to ease its movement restrictions on UN agencies.

Ms Redgrave is making her first ever visit to Palestine, after nearly 30 years of campaigning for peace and justice in the Middle East, as a guest of UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, and as a Goodwill Ambassador of UNICEF, the UN's children's agency. She has already toured some of the crowded refugee camps of the Gaza Strip, seeing for herself the conditions in which Palestine refugees live. She has visited an UNRWA clinic, taken part in a women's community discussion about the difficulties of their lives under occupation and helped to launch a UNICEF measles immunization campaign targeting all children under five in the OPT. Ms Redgrave also visited the Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation (PYALARA) and the Children's Municipal Council in Gaza City.

A planned visit to Rafah to meet some of the more than 15,000 people made homeless by Israel's house demolitions there had to be cancelled because of the internal closure of the Gaza Strip.

In the West Bank, Ms Redgrave has visited A'Ram and Qalqilya to see the impact of the barrier on Palestinian communities. Thousands of refugees who rely on UNRWA's humanitarian aid will be cut off from humanitarian services by the barrier.

As part of an extensive cultural programme, Ms Redgrave and the British violinist and composer Stephen Bentley, of the InKlein Quartet, will perform for Palestinian children at the Kalandia children's centre in Kalandia refugee camp. Mr Bentley will also give a violin masterclass at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music summer camp at Emmaus village. Ms Redgrave will perform a short programme of readings at the Al Kasabah Theatre in Ramallah and attend a performance of the theatre's production of *Smile for Palestine*.

At a press conference in Jerusalem Ms Redgrave appealed to the international community to contribute more to UNRWA's Emergency Appeal for the West Bank and Gaza for 2004. So far only 30 per cent (\$62 million out of \$209 million) of UNRWA's needs for the year has been pledged.

UNRWA needs the funding to provide more than 1 million people in the OPT with food aid; to create jobs for unemployed breadwinners; re-housing for the more than 21,000 who have lost their homes in the last three years and counselling for children traumatised by their experience of violence.

Ms Redgrave also highlighted the security restrictions on Gaza that mean UNRWA has been forced to delay its latest food distribution by three weeks because of measures imposed by the Israeli authorities on access to Gaza for UNRWA's food containers. UNRWA has 250 containers of food stuck in Ashdod port, and another 800 arriving in the next two months, while people are going hungry in Gaza. UNRWA needs to be able to bring 20 containers a day into Gaza and under current restrictions can only manage 5-6 a day.

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