



UNRWA

PRESS RELEASE

Press Release No. HQ/G/27/2004
24 September 2004
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Israeli Authorities Impose More Intransigent Restrictions On UNRWA Staff Members' Freedom of Movement at Erez Crossing

GAZA -The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has today protested to the Israeli Government following new and constantly changing restrictions affecting the freedom of movement of UN staff crossing into and out of the Gaza Strip.

International staff members holding valid United Nations Laissez-Passers are now being obliged to cross on foot through the Palestinian labourers terminal. Only those holding a diplomatic visa can go through in their vehicles, and even they are prohibited from carrying other UN colleagues with them. Passage on foot leaves the staff members exposed to considerable risk, as numerous incidents in the recent past can testify, so this modality is prohibited under current UN security rules. As a result, the new Israeli restrictions are in effect barring UN international staff from crossing into and out Gaza.

Yesterday, a group of UN staff members, who needed to travel abroad through Ben Gurion airport or Allenby bridge, were delayed at Erez for five hours and ultimately denied crossing in the car of a colleague holding a diplomatic visa. Intensive efforts at coordination and liaison with the Israeli authorities yielded no result. Even after the United Nations Designated Official for Security authorized their passage on foot on an exceptional basis, they were subjected to further delays and humiliating searches by Israeli soldiers.

Mr. Peter Hansen, Commissioner General of UNRWA, said: "I have already been forced to relocate almost all the Agency's international staff due to the repeated instances where measures taken by Israeli Authorities have put the lives of my staff at risk. Liaison and coordination are increasingly futile exercises in diplomatic nicety which do not produce reasonable or even rational solutions. Both the freedom of movement of UNRWA's staff and their safety (for which the Israeli authorities are responsible) need to be respected in full".

-END-

For more information please call Johan Eriksson on +972 59 428 022 or Adnan Abu Hasna on +972 59 428 061