



UNRWA

PRESS RELEASE

Press Release No. HQ/G/30/2004
02 October, 2004
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Response by Commissioner-General Peter Hansen to allegations regarding misuse of a UN vehicle

GAZA - On 1 October in the evening the Israel Defense Forces provided video footage to the international press purporting to show "a UN vehicle transporting a Qassam rocket". Given the gravity of the allegation, I immediately ordered my staff to obtain a copy of the footage in question and initiated an investigation into the alleged facts.

On the footage: I have now seen the footage in question. I can confirm it shows one of UNRWA's ambulances. It then shows three persons walking swiftly towards it. One of these persons is carrying in one hand a light, long and thin object. The person then easily throws the object into the back of the ambulance.

(Note: the footage has erased the indication of the date on which it was shot. There is no way of identifying when or where the clip was taken.)

On the investigation: UNRWA's investigation into the facts included interviews with all the ambulance drivers and crews who have been active in the area. I am fully satisfied with the veracity of the testimony given to me by these UNRWA staff members, who have solemnly declared that they have acted in conformity with stringent UN rules of behaviour at all times. I might add that these staff members are carrying out highly dangerous humanitarian work with selfless commitment.

While the quality of the video clip is poor, its analysis shows beyond the shadow of a doubt that the object carried and thrown into the vehicle is not / cannot be a Qassam rocket: I have been told that a Qassam rocket weighs at least 32 kilogrammes and that its diameter is approx. 17 cm. On neither count does the object shown in the film correspond in the least to this description: it is much thinner, longer and obviously much lighter than a rocket. In my mind and in that of those whom I have consulted, it is clearly a folded stretcher, a logical and indispensable accessory in any ambulance.

It is not the first time that the Government of Israel has propagated falsehoods against UNRWA: a few months ago, two Cabinet Ministers declared in public that UNRWA ambulances were carrying body parts of fallen Israeli soldiers. When challenged to produce the evidence backing up this claim, or to retract the statement and offer an apology, the Ministers in question were not able to provide any response and have remained silent. In that case too, a thorough investigation was carried out and led to the conclusion that there was not a shred of evidence to suggest that the claim had any basis in fact.

I should like to emphasize in closing that I am concerned that such false allegations can lead to increased aggressive behaviour by Israelis towards the United Nations in general and UN humanitarian staff in particular, and therefore seriously increase the risks which UN personnel face in this zone of violent conflict.

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