



# UNRWA

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **UNRWA: Concerns at Humanitarian Impact of Strike.**

Peter Hansen, the Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), has expressed his growing concern and distress over the humanitarian situation of over 660,000 Palestine refugees in the West Bank. The refugees have been denied essential services, including emergency relief, by the continued strike of UNRWA's 4,000 local staff in that area of its operations.

Mr. Hansen is particularly worried about the effect the absence of teachers from schools is having on 60,000 pupils at UNRWA's 95 schools in the West Bank, many of whom have already lost hundreds of schools days due to other interruptions caused by curfews and closures.

He is also disturbed by the denial of emergency health services to refugees and the possibly tragic consequences of delayed vaccinations. Of special concern are those chronically ill refugees who now have no access to UNRWA-supplied medicines and the current lack of ambulance services. In addition, the Agency is very worried about the deteriorating sanitary conditions in refugee camps where solid waste is becoming an increasing health hazard.

The strike has brought to a halt the distribution of basic food rations to the very poorest refugees - those in UNRWA's Special Hardship programme (some 38,000 refugees) as well as the thousands of beneficiaries of UNRWA's emergency food aid - and has delayed shipments of food items and medical supplies.

In a statement issued today, Mr. Hansen asked all UNRWA area staff in the West Bank to put the interests of the refugee population that they serve above all other considerations. The Agency's management has never closed the door on negotiations and is willing to consider legitimate demands once the strike is over. "The general respect and admiration that UNRWA staff have enjoyed in the past is being undermined by an apparent disregard for the needs of the refugee community that they serve," he said.

UNRWA's Area Staff Union began its strike on October 11 in a dispute about staff pay.

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