



UNRWA

PRESS RELEASE

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UNRWA Opens School to shelter Homeless Palestinians in Khan Younis

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) urgently opened one of its schools in the Khan Younis refugee camp to provide temporary accommodation to 127 families (600 persons) who were forced to flee their homes following the IDF incursion in Khan Younis on Friday, 17 December 2004. The Agency immediately served these families with hot meals and water in addition to mattresses, blankets and mats.

The IDF two-day offensive on Khan Younis resulted in the killing of eleven Palestinians and the injury of 45 others. During the operation, 43 shelters accommodating 51 refugee families (303 persons) were completely demolished. Three more shelters housing three refugee families (25 persons) were partially destroyed. In addition to a one-time cash payment, UNRWA will cover the rental expenses for the affected refugee families until alternative housing is secured for them.

The new demolitions in Khan Younis bring the number of homes demolished in the Gaza Strip alone since the beginning of the uprising (Intifada) to 2,957 shelters, rendering homeless over 28,000 Palestinians. Of them, 2,487 shelters - 84 percent of the total – accommodated refugee families. Utilizing contributions from various donor countries, UNRWA has so far built or is in the process of building 903 dwelling units for 979 refugee families at a cost of US\$ 20.7 million. An additional US\$ 52 million is still required to enable the Agency to rehouse the remaining 2,491 families found eligible for assistance under the Agency's Rehousing Scheme in Gaza.

Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, said: "We hear from all quarters that there is finally an opportunity for change in this battered land. But what I see on the ground is more death and destruction. Israel must ensure its citizens' security, but such incursions are hardly conducive to reinvigorating the peace process. I hope restraint on all sides can finally put an end to this ongoing humanitarian tragedy".

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