



**UNITED NATIONS**

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**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**

**AS AID ARRIVES IN GAZA, UN URGES REGULARIZED ACCESS**

(New York: 20 June 2007): As nearly 20 truckloads of food and medical supplies have been moved into the Gaza Strip through the crossing at Kerem Shalom in the past two days, the United Nations calls on Israel and the Palestinian authorities now to regularize access for commercial and humanitarian food imports.

“The news that some urgently needed supplies have got through the Kerem Shalom crossing is welcome,” said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator today. “However, we now need to regularize access for essential goods such as food and medicines, in order to prevent further deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Gaza,” he added, noting that all other crossing points into Gaza presently remain closed. “That is what we are now working on.”

The World Food Programme (WFP) reports that seven of its trucks successfully crossed into Gaza yesterday, with a further nine crossing today. The WFP plans to send 10 trucks per day into Gaza, which relies on the importation of all basic commodities. The World Health Organization (WHO) also reported moving a truck with medical supplies into Gaza yesterday.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reports that its wheat flour reserves will be exhausted in ten days, while the WFP says its reserves will last for only seven unless normal imports are resumed. The UNRWA provides food aid to 850,000 Palestinian refugees living in Gaza, while the WFP assists a further 275,000 Gaza residents. The total population of the Gaza Strip is 1.4 million people.

The opening of the Karni crossing is particularly vital to prevent general food shortages from developing within two to four weeks. Commercial food stocks are quickly being depleted in Gaza. Already the price of wheat flour has risen by 40 per cent in the past week, while there are signs that hoarding of food stocks is a risk. At present, UNRWA has 104 containers of food waiting at the Karni crossing.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that fuel, electricity and water supplies remain at normal levels, while hospitals, primary clinics and emergency health services are continuing to operate. Immediate shortages in medical supplies have been offset by the arrival of the WHO supplies, as well as two truckloads of supplies from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and vaccines from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). However, fuel supplies for hospital generators and ambulances will be exhausted within one week unless payments to Israeli providers are guaranteed.

“We need to ensure that all the civilian populations’ emergency needs are met and quickly,” stressed Mr. Holmes. “Thus, while applauding this morning’s reports that Israel is to allow those Gazans in need of medical treatment who have gathered at the Erez crossing to enter the country, I also urge all parties to ensure that the population can access adequate health care within the Gaza Strip.”

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