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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

MORE UN AID REACHING GAZA, BUT MUCH FREER ACCESS STILL NEEDED

(New York: 28 June 2007): The United Nations agencies are making progress towards meeting the basic needs of the Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip at present -- as of today getting the equivalent of 80 to 90 trucks of relief supplies into the territory daily -- but there is still a long way to go.

“Everyone is working hard on this and I welcome the news of our increased capacity to deliver urgently-needed aid in Gaza, but I cannot overemphasize the importance of ensuring the resumption of full-scale supplies through the main crossing points and beginning to open up regular economic access too,” said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

“Already, we have seen the WFP report 100,000 additional food aid recipients since the beginning of this crisis. Without a functioning economy, an ever larger share of the population will become dependent on outside assistance for survival to prevent an even worse humanitarian tragedy. I appeal to all concerned, Israelis and Palestinians alike, to do all they can to increase access to Gaza,” added Mr. Holmes.

According to the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Kevin M. Kennedy, the agencies’ full capacity target is between 100 to 150 trucks per day, while most estimates indicate that 175 truckloads of imports per day, five days a week, are needed to meet the population’s minimum requirements. During the past week, only 21 per cent of total daily needs have been met by imports.

The crossing at Kerem Shalom can only take some 20 to 25 trucks per day at present; even doubling its capacity would be insufficient to meet basic needs. The United Nations has identified some improvements, which could greatly increase its capacity, such as cleaning existing conveyer belts to enable them to move commodities such as sugar, flour and animal feed and enlarging the paved area at the crossing. These measures could increase the crossing’s capacity to 150 trucks per day. The Sufa crossing has also been open, though its capacity is also limited.

Meanwhile, the Karni crossing has reportedly opened today, at least partially, for the first time in over two weeks. Some 5,000 tonnes of wheat is expected to be transported by conveyer belt into the territory, to be processed in mills in Gaza and then bought by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). The crossing could not be opened yesterday, as initially expected, due to security concerns.

The Erez crossing remains open for the staff of international agencies and health referrals to Israel and no interruptions have occurred along the Nahal Oz line, which supplies diesel, petrol and cooking gas to Gaza. However, the Rafah crossing -- the main crossing for people -- remains closed since 10 June, with a reported 5,000 Gazans waiting at the Egyptian border to return to Gaza.

In total, the World Food Programme (WFP) is providing for the basic food needs of some 377,000 Gazans, while UNRWA distributes food assistance to 860,000. As of 25 June, basic food supplies remaining in the territory included nine days worth of flour, three days of sugar, 15 days of rice, 14 days of oil and 51 days of lentils. The Palestinian Ministry of Health has also reported that 81 items on the Essential Drugs List are out of stock, while low stock levels are reported for a further 43 items. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has brought in 98,000 vaccines for measles, mumps and rubella, tuberculosis and tetanus.

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