



Press Statement

Humanitarian organisations deeply concerned about the ongoing water and sanitation crisis in Gaza; Call for an immediate opening of Gaza's crossings 3 September 2009

The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) Mr Maxwell Gaylard, together with the NGO Association for International Development Agencies (AIDA), today called for full and unrestricted access for spare parts and materials critically needed to restore Gaza's water and sanitation services.

“The deterioration and breakdown of water and sanitation facilities in Gaza is compounding an already severe and protracted denial of human dignity in the Gaza Strip” stated Mr Gaylard. “At the heart of this crisis is a steep decline in standards of living for the people of Gaza, characterised by erosion of livelihoods, destruction and degradation of basic infrastructure, and a marked downturn in the delivery and quality of vital services in health, water and sanitation,” added Mr Gaylard.

Under human rights law all people have the right to an adequate standard of living and the highest attainable standard of health. Both of these rights include access to sufficient quantities of safe, accessible and affordable water, as well as proper sanitation services and facilities.

As a result of the closure of Gaza's crossing points imposed by Israel since June 2007, equipment and supplies needed for the construction, maintenance and operation of water and sanitation facilities have been denied entry to Gaza, leading to the gradual deterioration of these essential services. Destruction caused during the Israeli military offensive in 2008/2009 exacerbated an already critical situation, leaving some services and facilities on the brink of collapse. Whilst some essential construction and repair items have been permitted to enter since then, this is nowhere near enough to restore a fully-functioning water and sanitation system for the people of Gaza.

Currently, some 10,000 persons in Gaza remain without access to the water network and an additional 60% of the population do not have continuous access to water. Furthermore, since January 2008, due to damage to sewage treatment facilities, lack of treatment capacity due to postponed plant upgrade projects, and a critical shortage of fuel and electricity necessary to operate them, some 50-80 million litres of untreated and partially treated waste-water are being discharged daily into the Mediterranean Sea.

The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator and Non Governmental Organisations call upon the Government of Israel to take immediate steps to ensure the entry into Gaza of construction and repair materials necessary to respond to the water and sanitation crisis that exists in the Gaza Strip. “Without addressing both the immediate basic needs of the population and facilitating the longer term development and management of the degraded water and sanitation sector, public health and the wider environment will remain at significant risk. Pollution does not recognise borders or barriers, and communities throughout the region are threatened by the deficiencies of Gaza's water and sanitation system”, said Mr. Gaylard.

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