



Remarks by Humanitarian Coordinator in the occupied Palestinian territory

Mr. James W. Rawley

Gaza Emergency 2014: Press Conference

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Good morning everyone. I am here today, accompanying the UNRWA Commissioner General Mr. Pierre Kraehenbuehl, in difficult circumstances. This past week has witnessed a dramatic escalation of conflict, with the worst impact being suffered by the civilian population of the Gaza Strip, which we see very clearly here at this school.

Our thoughts must first be with those many civilians who have already lost their lives, and the even greater number of who have suffered physical or psychological injuries. Our paramount concern must be with the safety and well-being of all civilians no matter where they are. Our first call must, therefore, be for an immediate return to calm and a ceasefire understanding in order to avoid further needless loss of life.

While we await those much needed steps, we must once again remind all parties that they must strictly adhere to international humanitarian law. This means ensuring full respect for the principles of distinction between civilians and combatants, proportionality, and taking precautions to avoid civilian casualties. Attacks should not be directed against civilian objects, including infrastructure and buildings that are UN-supported or run. Nor should military assets be located in densely populated areas, or attacks launched from such areas.

Today we have had a small glimpse of the damage incurred so far and the wide-range of humanitarian impacts that are emerging. These include damage to 66 schools, and the destruction of over 940 homes, as well as damage to health, education, water and sanitation facilities, and electricity infrastructure that make it increasingly difficult to provide even the most basic

services. Moreover, some 16,000 Palestinians have already fled their homes and are taking refuge at shelters such as the one we are in today.

But my thoughts are particularly with Gaza's children, not only those who are already casualties of this latest conflict, but all of Gaza's children for whom fear and insecurity are a not only a reality today but a scar that will endure for a lifetime.

These recent impacts are all the more devastating as they take place against a backdrop of poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, and a failed economy – what many term the “de-development” of Gaza. Added to this are the chronic energy and water shortages, which pose not only a daily challenge for Gazans, but also represent a looming crisis that will be unmanageable unless we begin to address it today. This is largely the product of years of strict movement and access restrictions imposed by Israel, the closure of the illegal tunnel trade with Egypt, and the internal Palestinian divide. In short, the civilian population of Gaza was already stretched to its limit before this latest crisis.

The United Nations is committed to address Gaza's needs both today and in the future so that Gaza can realize its full, promising potential. Humanitarian organizations, including UNRWA and the fifteen other UN agencies working in Gaza, as well as our national and international NGO partners and the Red Cross Movement, are continuing to provide essential services to the people of Gaza. I want to take this opportunity to commend them for their work under difficult, and in many cases dangerous, circumstances.

But we can not do this alone. We therefore encourage all parties to continue to work closely with humanitarian actors to facilitate the safe, rapid and unimpeded provision of humanitarian assistance, and to mobilize the resources necessary to respond.

Ladies and Gentleman:

While our immediate priority is to end the current round of hostilities, for the ceasefire to be sustainable it will have to address political, security, and development challenges as well. In

other words, for us to avoid yet another cycle of violence the underlying causes of this conflict must be addressed.

The UN and humanitarian partners stand ready to work with all parties to both alleviate immediate humanitarian suffering and achieve these longer-term goals.

Thank you.