

Amnesty International UK, CARE International UK, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Médecins du Monde UK, Oxfam, Save The Children UK and Trócaire

## PRESS RELEASE

# GAZA: HUMANITARIAN SITUATION WORST SINCE 1967

**Poverty and unemployment up, hospitals suffering 12 hour a day power cuts, water and sewage system close to collapse**

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is worse now than it's been at any time since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967, according to a new report published today (6 March) by a coalition of leading humanitarian and human rights organisations. The weekend's upsurge in violence and human misery underlines the urgency of this report.

In their new joint report, the coalition - comprising Amnesty International, CARE International UK, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Médecins du Monde UK, Oxfam, Save The Children UK and Trócaire - warns that Israel's blockade of Gaza is a collective punishment of the entire Gazan civilian population of 1.5 million. The report concludes that the Israeli government's policy of blockade is unacceptable, illegal and fails to deliver security for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Geoffrey Dennis, Chief Executive of CARE International UK said:

**"The recent escalation in violence, both from rocket attacks and military strikes, will make life even more unbearable in Gaza. Unemployment has soared and 80% of people in Gaza are now dependent on food aid compared to 63% in 2006. Water and sewage infrastructure is on the point of total collapse. Unless the blockade ends now, it will be impossible to pull Gaza back from the brink of this disaster and any hopes for peace in the region will be dashed."**

According to the report (list of key statistics in notes below), the blockade of Gaza has dramatically worsened levels of poverty and unemployment and has led to deterioration in education and health services. Over 1.1 million people are now dependent on food aid and of 110,000 workers previously employed in the private sector, 75,000 workers have now lost their jobs.

Amnesty International UK Director Kate Allen said:

**"Israel has the right and obligation to protect its citizens, but as the occupying power in Gaza it also has a legal duty to ensure that Gazans have access to food, clean water, electricity and medical care. Punishing the entire Gazan population by denying them these basic human rights is utterly indefensible. The current situation is man-made and must be reversed."**

The coalition's 16 page report, *"The Gaza Strip: A humanitarian implosion"*, urges the UK government and EU to press for a new strategy for Gaza. In particular, the report calls on the UK government to:

\* Exert greater pressure on the Israeli government to open the crossings into Gaza and stop fuel and electricity cuts in order to stem the worsening humanitarian crisis.

\* Help facilitate a process of Palestinian reconciliation that can lead to a credible and effective peace process with Israel.

\* Abandon the failed policy of non-engagement and begin negotiations with all Palestinian parties, including Hamas.

The report calls on the Israeli Government and Palestinian armed groups to immediately cease all attacks against civilians. All unlawful attacks must stop: the Government of Israel should put an immediate end to disproportionate attacks in Gaza and Palestinian armed groups should immediately stop indiscriminate rocket attacks into southern Israel.

Christian Aid's Director, Daleep Mukarji, said:

**“The UK government should acknowledge that a new strategy is needed for Gaza. The current policy does not secure vital security for Israeli citizens, and even if it did the blockade policy would still be unacceptable and illegal. Humanitarian aid can help stave off total collapse but it will not provide a long-term solution. Gaza cannot become a partner for peace unless Israel, Fatah and the Quartet engage with Hamas and give the people of Gaza a future.”**

**ENDS**

Notes to editors

For more information, a copy of the report or interviews, please contact: Crisis Action: 020 7269 9451, 07791 586211

*“The Gaza Strip: A humanitarian implosion”* is a joint report from: Amnesty International UK, CARE International UK, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Médecins du Monde UK, Oxfam, Save the Children UK and Trócaire.

Available for interview

**NGO spokespeople:**

Adam Leach, Middle East Director, Oxfam GB (London)

David Mepham, Head of Policy, Save the Children UK (London)

Donatella Rovera, Researcher for Israel and OPT, Amnesty International (Israel)

Geoffrey Dennis, CEO, CARE International UK (London)

Janet Symes, Head of Middle East Region, Christian Aid (London)

Martha Myers, Head of Programme, CARE West Bank and Gaza (Jerusalem)

Michael Bailey, Oxfam GB (Jerusalem)

Rana el Hendi, Monitoring and Documentation Officer, Save the Children UK (Gaza)

Susan Wright, Director, Médecins du Monde UK (London)

**Also available for interview:**

Alastair Crooke, Conflicts Forum (Beirut)

Ahmed Sourani, Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (Gaza)

Andrea Becker, Head of Advocacy, Medical Aid for Palestinians (London)

Gabrielle Rifkind, Oxford Research Group (London)

Geoffrey Bindman, Expert on International Humanitarian Law (London)  
John Ging, Director of UNRWA (Gaza)  
Lord John Alderdice, speaking on applying lessons from Irish peace process (London)  
Majeda al Saqqa, Culture and Free Thought Association (Gaza)  
Miri Weingarten, Physicians for Human Rights (Israel)  
Rabbi Danny Rich, Chief Executive, Liberal Judaism (London)  
Sari Bahsi, Gisha (Israel)

## **MEDIA BRIEFING: KEY GAZA STATISTICS**

### Poverty

**80% of families in Gaza** currently rely on food aid compared to 63% in 2006. This amounts to approximately 1.1 million people (OCHA, 2007).

In 2007, households were spending approximately **62% of their total income on food** compared with 37% in 2004 (WFP, 2007).

During the period of May-June 2007 alone, commodity prices for wheat flour, baby milk, and rice rose 34%, 30% and 20.5% respectively (WFP, 2007).

During the period June-September 2007, the number of households in Gaza earning **less than \$1.2 per person per day** soared from 55% to 70% (WFP, 2007).

### Economic collapse

In September 2000, some 24 000 Palestinians crossed out of Gaza everyday to work in Israel (World Bank, 2006). Today that figure is **zero**.

Unemployment in Gaza is close to 40 percent in Gaza and is set to rise to **50 percent** (OCHA, 2007).

In the months before the blockade began around 250 trucks a day entered Gaza through Sufa with supplies, now it is only able to accommodate a maximum of **45 trucks a day**. In most cases, this number is barely reached.

**95% of Gaza's industrial operations are suspended** due to the ban on imported raw materials and the block on exports (World Bank, 2007).

### Basic services

**40-50 million litres of sewage** continues to pour into the sea daily (Oxfam, 2008).

As a result of fuel and electricity restrictions, hospitals are currently experiencing **power cuts lasting for 8-12 hours a day**. There is currently a 60-70 percent shortage reported in the diesel required for hospital power generators.

### Health

**18.5% of patients** seeking emergency treatment in hospitals outside Gaza in 2007 were refused permits to leave (WHO, 2007).

The proportion of patients given permits to exit Gaza for medical care decreased from 89.3% in January 2007 to 64.3% in December 2007, **an unprecedented low** (WHO, 2007).

During the period October-December 2007, WHO has confirmed the **deaths of 20 patients, including 5 children** (among people awaiting visas) (WHO, 2007).

**ENDS**