

Isolation of Gaza must end, say international NGOs

As international NGOs working in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) we are increasingly concerned by the isolation and steady deterioration in the living conditions of Gaza's civilian population. This isolation could generate further economic collapse and the subsequent dependency of most of its people.

We condemn indiscriminate attacks and other human rights violations and abuses against civilians by all parties. At the same time we are concerned by the designation of Gaza by the State of Israel as a "hostile territory". The decision to limit fuel and potentially electricity to the general population constitutes a form of collective punishment which directly contravenes international humanitarian law.

International NGOs report that inadequate amounts of humanitarian goods are entering Gaza including commodities crucial for the maintenance of public health infrastructure, such as component parts for water supply and sanitation systems. Some essential programs have been frozen. Gaza's agriculture sector is also being eroded and projects with poor farmers cannot continue as seedlings and irrigation components are being refused entry.

The closure of the Karni crossing, the main point of entry into Gaza for commercial goods, is now devastating the private sector which accounts for 54% of all employment. Current restrictions have led to the suspension of 90% of Gaza's industry which employs 35,000 workers whose livelihoods are now on the line. Unemployment in Gaza is already 35% and as these workers' jobs are lost, over two hundred thousand dependent family members will be directly affected.

At this time, we urge all responsible parties including the State of Israel which remains the occupying power with 'effective control' of Gaza, to refrain from actions that collectively punish civilians. Civilians must never be punished for an offense they have not personally committed.

Gaza should remain open for the movement of people and goods particularly for social, health and economic well-being. All parties have an obligation to ensure safe and unfettered humanitarian access is upheld at all times.

In the interest of protecting civilians in Gaza, rather than pursuing sanctions and/or the use of force, we urge negotiation be prioritized at all times, by all responsible parties, including non-state actors. We call on the donor community and the United Nations to exercise its influence to allow access to international NGO personnel and materials needed to carry out humanitarian and development projects in Gaza.

Signed by the following AIDA member organizations:

1. American Friends Service Committee
2. Asociación para la Cooperación con el Sur - Las Segovias (ACSUR)
3. Campaign for the Children of Palestine
4. Catholic Relief Services
5. Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP)
6. Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI)
7. Cooperazione Internazionale Sud-Sud (CISS)
8. Defense for Children International - Palestine Section
9. Diakonia
10. Gruppo di Volontariato Civile (GVC)
11. Handicap International
12. Italian Consortium of Solidarity (ICS)
13. Japan International Volunteer Center
14. MDM Medecins Du Monde
15. Medical Aid for Palestine - UK
16. Medico International
17. Mercy Corps
18. Mundubat
19. Norwegian Church Aid
20. Norwegian Refugee Council
21. Oxfam International
22. The Palestine Solidarity Association of Sweden
23. Premiere Urgence
24. Solidaridad Internacional
25. The Swedish Organization for Individual Relief
26. Terre des Hommes Italy (TDH-IT)
27. Unity and Cooperation for the Development of the Peoples (UCODEP)
28. Welfare Association
29. World Vision Jerusalem