

## The Gaza Strip – A Call to End the Current Humanitarian Catastrophe

21/1/08 - Jerusalem - Caritas Jerusalem joins the call of all concerned parties in the Holy Land, UN agencies, International NGOs working in the area and the international community to see the Gaza situation change

immediately.

Last week, 35 people in Gaza were killed and scores of others were injured<sup>1</sup> by Israeli missile strikes and Israeli military incursions. In January, Gaza saw 'the worst violence in recent months'<sup>2</sup>, with reports of 61 people dead.<sup>3</sup> Many of those killed and injured were innocent bystanders. This escalation follows the visit of President Bush which raised hopes for advancing peace, but in the aftermath, military actions increased on both sides.

The recent violence has seen tighter measures enacted by the Israeli army as a result. This includes a complete closure of Gaza to all aid supplies. Starting on Thursday (January 18), the Gaza Strip was ordered completely sealed off due to ongoing Kassam rocket attacks directed at Israel emanating from Gaza. From January 17-19, militants in Gaza fired 130 Kassam rockets and 80 mortars at Israel.<sup>4</sup> This has led to the loss of power to Gaza which has exacerbated further an already desperate situation of immense human suffering. The following points about Gaza's situation are immediate causes for concern:



This photo is taken from the Al Quds newspaper on 15/1/2008 of a family from Gaza with the children studying by candlelight during a power blackout (Photo: Al Quds newspaper - January 15 2008)

- **Border closure** - John Holmes, UN undersecretary general - humanitarian affairs, called it "unacceptable" and "morally unjustifiable" for Israel to close the border to a daily average of 120 trucks of food/humanitarian supplies entering Gaza.
- **Dependence on International Aid** ... "In Gaza, we're getting to a situation where virtually all of the population is dependent on international aid supplies," said Holmes.
- **Increased violence** - "This violence is putting what is already an extremely worrying and fragile humanitarian situation into an even more dangerous context." ... "The Israeli reaction is not justified by those rocket attacks, even though it's caused by those rocket attacks," said Holmes.<sup>5</sup>
- **Health Care Sector functioning in an emergency environment** - It has been reported in the media that some 48 medical cases<sup>6</sup> have entered Israel for treatment and another 21 have entered Jordan<sup>7</sup>, but among a population of 1.5 million, this is an insufficient number. According to the National Committee for Confronting the Siege in Gaza: "There are 450 cancer patients in the Gaza Strip and 400 suffering from kidney failure and 450 with heart problems, exposed to a genuine threat on their lives due to the lack of medicine and adequate equipment to follow-up on their cases, in addition to the ban on their travel. ... The same sources have indicated that between 600-700 cases in Gaza require monthly travel for treatment and 250-300 medical cases require urgent treatment. ..."<sup>8</sup>
- **Need for electricity and fuel urgent** - Electricity and fuel are urgently needed for hospitals to remain open and working. Hospitals that have power generators only have a limited time before fuel supplies run out and services to the hospitals are seriously disrupted. Hospitals are only responding now to urgent emergency situations.
- **Food shortages** - With electricity cuts, fuel shortages and closure of the entry of food into Gaza, the citizens are worried about a bread shortage. "Dozens of people were seen lining outside a bakery in downtown Gaza, fearing the electricity cutoff would lead to a bread shortage."<sup>9</sup> Food is scarce and UN agencies have only limited supplies in place.

Caritas Jerusalem calls for an immediate end to the blockade facing Gaza, an urgent appeal to help address the humanitarian situation there and for an end to all military actions by the Israeli Army and by militants in Gaza

<sup>1</sup> Jan. 20 2008 story – BBC – Gaza economy crushed by embargo

<sup>2</sup> Tobias Buck, Financial Times, 'Gaza Sees Increase in Attacks', January 8, 2008, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/00369e68-bd8b-11dc-b7e6-0000779fd2ac.html>

<sup>3</sup> Al-Quds, 3/1/2008, put the number of killings in Gaza due to the blockade in recent weeks to 61 people.

<sup>4</sup> "UN warns of humanitarian crisis as Israel seals Gaza crossings" by News Agencies & [www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com) – Jan. 19 2008

<sup>5</sup> Haaretz and News Agencies – Jan. 19 2008 - UN warns of humanitarian crisis as Israel seals Gaza crossings

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-3496252.00.html> – Gaza suffers as siege goes on

<sup>7</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/17/content\\_7433419.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/17/content_7433419.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Al-Quds Newspaper, Sunday, January 6, 2008 – article "Suffering from Kidney Failure"

<sup>9</sup> AP, 20/1/2008, story "Gaza power plant shuts down because of fuel shortage"