



Press release

July 25, 2006

Illness among children in Gaza rising dramatically – Swedish Sida increases humanitarian support

The crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) is so serious that the UN is again pleading for additional emergency relief for the entire civil population. Essential infrastructure has been bombed and there is an acute shortage of clean water, functional sanitation plants and electricity. Most recently, the incidence of illness among children in Gaza has increased dramatically. Likewise, among adults, the incidence of diarrhoea, for example, has increased by 163 percent compared to last year. The UN now fears a widespread outbreak of deadly diseases.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency – Sida – has resolved to contribute an additional SEK 15 million to UN humanitarian efforts in Gaza and on the West Bank. The contribution will finance food supplies, health, sanitation, and education. In response to this revised UN appeal, Sweden has in a relatively short time contributed a total of SEK 80 million (approximately EUR 8.5 million).

Intensified military operations following the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier in June have substantially aggravated the humanitarian situation in the OPT. The Israeli military has bombed power plants, bridges, roads, and water treatment plants. These actions have direct and indirect consequences for the civil population in poor and very densely populated areas. The crisis continues to worsen each day, resulting in greater poverty, illness, and death.

“The situation is precarious. The bombing of residential areas and the destruction of private property and civil infrastructure might constitute a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The party who commits this type of offence against humanitarian rights is obliged to repair the damage caused by its actions, either by restoring property to its original condition or through monetary compensation,” said Per Byman, Head of Sida’s humanitarian unit.

As an occupying power, Israel must also, according to International Humanitarian Law (the “rules of war”), assume special responsibility for the basic social and economic needs of the Palestinian population in the OPT.

“Since Israel has not honoured its responsibilities as outlined by International law, large parts of the Palestinian population are now wholly dependent on international relief. At present, 75 percent of the population in Gaza live in poverty,” said Byman.

Earlier this year Sida resolved to contribute SEK 65 million in support of the UN humanitarian appeal. The contribution was mainly being channelled through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), as well as through Unicef and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In response to this most recent appeal for aid, The additional SEK 15 million goes to support UNRWA's efforts in the occupied Palestinian areas.

Sweden's humanitarian contributions towards relief in Gaza and on the West Bank have increased significantly in recent years – from SEK 178 million in 2000, to SEK 321 million in 2005. During 2006, Sweden has contributed SEK 370 million (EUR 39.3 million) to Palestinian humanitarian relief.

**For more information, contact the SIDA press office.
Phone: +46 (0)8 698 5555.**