

# News Release

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## HALF A MILLION PALESTINIANS NEED FOOD AID

**Jerusalem** - The United Nations World Food Programme today launched an emergency operation to help feed about half a million non-refugee Palestinians no longer able to afford their basic needs amid dramatically deteriorating living conditions in the Palestinian Territories.

"Hunger and malnutrition are rapidly increasing among the Palestinians. Even when food is available in some of the markets, many impoverished Palestinians have become increasingly unable to meet all their food needs," said WFP Regional Director Khaled Adly who has recently visited the territories.

"The situation is quite alarming and an increasing number of families over the past six months have been forced to reduce their food intake to make ends meet."

WFP hopes to help the most needy 500,000 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with about 70,000 tons of food to provide for their basic needs until the end of the year. With about 29,000 tons of food already covered, this eight-month operation is short of about 41,000 tons of food worth over USD 18 million.

Before the latest fighting, the West Bank and Gaza Strip were already in a state of crisis with as many as 180,000 people having lost their jobs over the previous 18 months. "The latest Israeli military incursions have dealt a hard blow to an already vulnerable economy pushing many Palestinians into destitution," Adly said.

According to a recent World Bank study, up to 50% of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories live under the poverty line, earning less than \$2 a day per person. The Palestinian authority is no longer able to run social welfare programmes effectively.

Largely dependent on Israel, the Palestinian agricultural and food economy has been foundering. Due to extensive and prolonged Israeli closures and cumbersome security procedures, Palestinian farmers and fishermen are unable to sustain a regular supply for the local markets.

The Palestinian territories' annual cereal production averages around 60,000 metric tons, while needs are estimated at 800,000 metric tons, with the shortfall made up by commercial imports. With a disintegrating economy and regular disruption to the food transport and distribution networks, hundreds of thousands of poor Palestinians will find it very difficult to cope for months to come.

Of particular concern to the food aid agency of the United Nations are some 360,000 extremely poor Palestinians, 60% of whom belong to families where the breadwinner is a single mother, elderly, handicapped or chronically ill. WFP assistance will also go to help about 130,000 Palestinians who have lost their income as one or more members of the family lost their jobs in Israel due to security measures.

As well, many hospitals and other social institutions have become unable to meet all the food needs of poor Palestinians using their services. WFP is to provide food aid to about 10,000 people in these institutions including children, anaemic women and the elderly.

Even before the current crisis, many needy Palestinians had been dependent on special assistance provided by both the Palestinian Authority's ministry of Social Affairs and WFP.

"Over the past three months, the Palestinian Authority has been unable to ensure the payment of the monthly cash assistance to these vulnerable people, leaving WFP as their main lifeline," said Adly, voicing concern over restriction on access to some of these communities.

"Many poor Palestinians have been pushed to the edge. Now, our work together with other humanitarian agencies is to ensure that they do not fall prey to malnutrition, especially children

who could be scarred for life."

"WFP is appealing for all donors to help us with cash or in-kind food donations," said Adly. The food commodities to be distributed include wheat flour, rice, sugar, vegetable oil, and pulses.

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**WFP is the United Nations' front-line agency in the fight against global hunger. In 2001, WFP fed more than 77 million people in 82 countries including most of the world's refugees and internally displaced people.**

**WFP Global School Feeding Campaign -- As the largest provider of nutritious meals to poor school children, WFP has launched a global campaign aimed at ensuring the world's 300 million undernourished children are educated.**

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