

OPEC FUND EXTENDS US\$200,000 GRANT IN SUPPORT OF HUMANITARIAN AID PROGRAM FOR PALESTINIANS

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The OPEC Fund for International Development has approved a grant of US\$200,000 in support of an initiative to restore basic medical services for Palestinians. Sponsored by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the program aims to repair health care infrastructure, provide equipment and supplies, and implement a wide range of support services, placing a strong emphasis on addressing the needs of women and children.

As a result of the escalation in violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the increased use of military force, vital infrastructure and homes have been destroyed, and thousands have been injured or killed. Movement restrictions and the erection of barriers have limited the delivery of medical supplies and have prevented many people from reaching health care centers. This has meant extreme hardship for the population, particularly among women and children, as reflected in the increased maternal/infant mortality rates. In addition to the high number of physical injuries, this crisis is also causing widespread psychological trauma.

UNFPA, in coordination with other UN agencies and donors such as the US Agency for International Development, the Department for International Development, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Program, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the European Commission and the World Health Organization, has launched a humanitarian assistance program that will be implemented over a six to eight-month period.

A number of activities will be carried out, such as the rehabilitation and reconstruction of hospitals, clinics, family planning and women's health centers and nursing schools. Medical supplies and equipment will be provided, especially those required for handling obstetrical emergencies. Integrated psycho-social counseling and support programs for traumatized women and their families will also be established. Capacity-building schemes will provide extra training to healthcare workers and trainers, covering topics such as reproductive health, gender-based issues and communication skills. Community awareness programs will also be implemented, and the function of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics will be restored so that it will be able to provide the basic demographic and economic data necessary for reconstruction and development efforts.