

## **Fact Finding Mission to Al-Mawasi 05 September 2002**

Al Mawasi is an agriculturally fertile strip of land laying parallel to the Mediterranean Sea in Gaza. The 16-kilometer-long strip starts in the city of Rafah and extends throughout Khan Yunis until it reaches the city of Deir Al Balah in the north. The Oslo Agreements have classified Al Mawasi to be zone B where Israel is responsible for the security issues while the Palestinian Authority is responsible for the civil matters of the 12,000 residents of the region, most of who work in the fishing and agriculture sectors.

### **Overview**

Al Mawasi region is surrounded by the sea from the west, Egypt from the south, in addition to Israeli settlements from the east and the north in the Gush Katif block. The residents of this region are not permitted to enter the region except through three roads as specified by the Oslo Agreements: 1) the road leading to the city of Rafah through Tal Al Sultan checkpoint; 2) the road leading to Khan Yunis through Al Tuffah checkpoint; 3) the road leading north to Deir Al Balah to the checkpoint located at the beach. The region suffers from a general lack of basic infrastructure, primarily seen in the absence of health and educational facilities other than Jarar Al Qidwa School, which was opened in 1998 in Mawasi Khan Yunis and two health posts Mawasi Rafah and Mawasi Khan Yunis. The region is plagued with a general lack of communication, sewage and electrical power. The supply of potable and irrigation water is adequate.

### **Humanitarian Issues**

Under the severe internal closure regime imposed enforced since October 2001, all types of vehicles are prevented from entering or leaving the region. Exceptions are made, subject to prior authorization by IDF, for Palestinian Red Crescent (PRC) ambulances and vehicles of international relief organizations. The movement of residents across checkpoints is authorized, except for during frequent periods of total closures, which may vary from one day to up to one week. In addition to the outer siege of the region, internal siege frequently impedes the movement of residents outside of their population centers preventing them from reaching their nearby farms.

The impact of closures has been dramatic of Mawasi's economic activity. The agricultural production and fisheries have plummeted by an estimated 70 percent, resulting from the loss of market outlets both within Gaza Strip but also abroad (Gulf countries and Israel). A five-month long ban on fishing that was lifted in mid-July 2001 is said to have resulted in sizeable damages to the fishing fleet of Mawasi residents thus curtailing their production capacity. An estimated 800 Mawasi laborers are believed to be still engaged in agricultural production and service sectors in the nearby Israeli settlements. Although precarious, the supply of essential food and non-food commodities to the region is ensured thanks to "shuttle" local retailers hand-carrying

manufactured goods from Rafah and Khan Yunis through checkpoints. The dramatically declined household income rendered the overwhelming majority of the region's population reliant on external aid: UNRWA, WFP, CRIC food distributions covering the Mawasi population in its entirety are highly appreciated and appear to be of critical importance. The two local health facilities are adequately equipped for primary health services, but lack necessary equipment for maternity services (with the exception of pre-natal consultations) and surgical interventions. The local medical personnel reports a considerable rise in asthma, diabetes, skin diseases and hypertension/cardiovascular diseases attributable to the severe psychological strain on the Mawasi residents and the deteriorating environmental health situation. The beginning of the school year for Mawasi's school-age children attending Rafah and Khan Yunis primary schools may be in jeopardy, as a result of frequent total closures of checkpoints and prevailing insecurity and the difficulties of residents at meeting the high economic outlays involved in purchasing school uniforms, satchels and books.

### **Issues requiring humanitarian follow-up:**

1. Provision of electric generators for the two health posts;
2. Establishment of a primary school in Mawasi Rafah
3. Implementation of Job-Creation schemes in both sub-regions of Mawasi;
4. Monitoring of the closure regime, and movement of essential supplies and free passage of ambulances.

### **Ongoing Relief Efforts in Mawasi**

UNRWA - General Food Distribution;  
WFP/MSA - Food Distribution;  
ICRC - Health Services;  
MSF France - Primary Health and Psychosocial counseling;  
CRIC - Food Distributions.