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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF URGES IMMEDIATE RESUMPTION OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE GAZA STRIP

(New York, 21 November 2008): United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes today urged all parties to the conflict in the Gaza Strip to refrain from violence and to allow the immediate and sustained reopening of border crossings. “Measures which increase the hardship and suffering of the civilian population of the Gaza Strip as a whole are unacceptable and must cease immediately,” he stated. “The Secretary-General has repeatedly called on Israel to facilitate the delivery of steady and sufficient fuel and humanitarian assistance, and is disappointed that his call has not yet been heeded.”

On 5 November, following an Israeli Defense Forces operation in Gaza and the resumption of Palestinian rocket firing into Israel, the Israeli military closed all border crossings to Gaza. The closure stopped deliveries of basic supplies, including humanitarian assistance. Fuel delivery has stopped, including industrial fuel for the power plant and diesel for back up generator for wells and water pumps. As a consequence, the population endures daily electricity blackouts; and shortages of cooking gas, fresh food and water. Half of the bakeries have shut down due to the lack of cooking gas, and flour shortages are imminent. Food distributions which UNRWA had been able to resume on 17 November will likely be interrupted again in the coming days unless supplies are allowed to enter Gaza.

“The Secretary-General has condemned repeatedly rocket attacks aimed at Israeli civilian targets. At the same time, the closure of border crossings adds to the collective suffering of the civilian population, who have already endured extreme hardship for far too long. We must make sure that the humanitarian needs of the population are met, even in the most difficult political and security environment,” Mr. Holmes said.

Mr. Holmes expressed particular concern that the human dignity and wellbeing of the civilians in Gaza, over half of whom are children, do not appear to be a major issue for the parties to the conflict.

“I call upon the parties to refrain from actions that can directly or indirectly result in the disruption of essential services to the most vulnerable. I urge Israel to ensure the sustained and sufficient flow of goods in and out of Gaza; and make sure that aid organizations can reach people, whenever and wherever needed,” he added.

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