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The Food Aid Organization of the United Nations

WFP News Release

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WFP LAUNCHES EMERGENCY FOOD DISTRIBUTIONS TO FAMILIES AFFECTED BY CONFLICT IN GAZA

JERUSALEM – The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is responding to growing humanitarian needs in Gaza by distributing bread to families in areas that have been badly hit by the recent upsurge in conflict.

"The current situation in Gaza is appalling and many basic food items are no longer available on the market," said Christine van Nieuwenhuysse, WFP Representative in the occupied Palestinian territory, adding that Palestinian families living in Gaza are facing a variety of shortages of essential items and services.

Since the intermittent opening of the crossing points in November 2008, Palestinian families in Gaza have experienced a drastic deterioration in living conditions, with reduced quantities of food available on the market, shortages of cooking gas and fuel, and frequent power cuts.

As an emergency response to alleviate the suffering of families living close to areas affected by conflict, on Thursday WFP started an emergency distribution of bread in Beit Hanoun for 3,000 poor families - some 15,000 people who have not previously received WFP food assistance. This area in northern Gaza is one of the poorest and most heavily affected by the recent conflict.

The recent attacks in the Gaza Strip have prevented WFP and its partners from operating at full capacity and have delayed the normal distribution of food to 265,000 non-refugees and vulnerable individuals.

The difficulty of guaranteeing humanitarian access into Gaza over the last two months have reduced the availability of WFP food stocks, which would have helped address the new needs. WFP has 3,300 tons of food in warehouses which will be drawn down as food distributions resume, security permitting, over the next month. More food convoys are planned to replenish stocks for current and new food needs.

The scarcity of wheat has meant that the majority of mills and bakeries have stopped working

Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70, Parco de' Medici 00148 Rome, Italy

Telephone: +39-06-65131 Fax: +39-06-6590632/6590637

E-Mail: firstname.lastname@wfp.org Website: www.wfp.org



in Gaza, and there is an acute shortage of bread, the staple food for Palestinian people.

“We are responding to the immediate food emergency needs as much as we can, but the destruction of local infrastructure, and the shortages of basic utilities such as fuel and gas mean that more people will fall into poverty, and have no other option than to be assisted by the international community,” Nieuwenhuys said, adding that WFP urgently requires US\$ 9 million to meet foreseen additional food needs caused by the upsurge in fighting.

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WFP is the world's largest humanitarian agency and the UN's frontline agency for hunger solutions. This year, WFP plans to feed around 90 million people in 80 countries.

WFP now provides RSS feeds to help journalists keep up with the latest press releases, videos and photos as they are published on WFP.org. For more details see: <http://www.wfp.org/english/?n=999>.

WFP now has a dedicated ISDN line in Italy for quality two-way interviews with WFP officials.

For more information please contact :

Brenda Barton, Deputy Director Communications, WFP/Rome, Tel. +39-06-65132602,
Cell. +39-3472582217

Brenda.Barton@wfp.org (*ISDN line available*)

Christine VanNieuwenhuys, WFP/Occupied Palestinian Territories Representative,
Tel. +972 (0)2 5401340, Cell. +972 (0)54 6665003 Christine.VanNieuwenhuys@wfp.org

Barbara Conte, WFP/ Occupied Palestinian Territories, Tel. +972 (0)2 5401340,

Cell. +972 (0)54 5918151 or +39 338 31 32 557, Barbara.Conte@wfp.org

Rana Harb, WFP/Cairo, Tel. + 202-2528-1730 Ext. 2611, Cell. +201-0487-2972

Rana.Harb@wfp.org