



PRESS RELEASE

Rubble Removal will boost Gazan economy UNDP begins removing rubble in the Gaza Strip

Gaza City, July 9th 2009 - Contractors working for the United Nations today began clearing around 420,000 tonnes of rubble caused by Israeli bombing and fighting earlier this year.

UNDP estimated that 15,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed between December 27 and January 18. Clearance and crushing will take one year and provide 200,000 days of work. The total cost of UNDP's work is estimated at \$12 million. Canada has provided \$3.4 million and Sweden \$2.3 million towards the cost and UNDP is in negotiations to fill the funding gap.

Some rubble, blocking roads and pavements for example, has been cleared but the majority remains. Since January, UNDP and its partners have been raising money, training staff and negotiating access and contracts for the removal of the rubble.

Some of the damaged sites contain asbestos and other toxic materials while others may contain explosives. Staff have been trained to dispose of hazardous materials safely while the UN Mine Action Service will assess all sites and ensure the safety of high-risk sites.

The rubble, once crushed, could be used to re-build homes and infrastructure. However, if Israel continues to block the importation of materials and tools, only very limited re-building can take place and the sites that are being cleared will remain empty.

Israel has blocked the importation of anything but essential goods into Gaza, such as food and medicine, for two years. UNDP suspended \$60 million of construction projects in Gaza in 2007 because it could not acquire building materials. UNDP, in cooperation with other agencies continues to request the building materials it requires to re-start the suspended projects and begin new construction.

UNDP is working with the Norwegian Refugee Council, Mercy Corps, Foundation for Co-operative Housing and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to clear the rubble all over the Gaza Strip.

"The removal of rubble is an important start in helping Gazans get over the recent destruction. This project will help provide much needed work and improve the environment before re-building can start," said Jens Toyberg-Frandzen, UNDP's representative in the occupied Palestinian territory.

But he warned that a real change in the predicament of Gazans depends on Israel relaxing its sanctions on the Gaza Strip. "If the borders remain closed this investment will provide short term relief and not long term progress. Homes will not be rebuilt and the influx of money will not create growth. These efforts will only succeed if they are mirrored by greater commitment from the international community and local governments to improve the living conditions of ordinary Gazans," he said.

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