

Press Release

Gazans Cite Psychological Toll, Unemployment as Major Concerns, According to a UNDP Survey

Agriculture and Private Sector Incur Massive Damages, UN Reports

Jerusalem, February 9, 2009 – Three weeks of fighting in Gaza has had a strong economic, social and psychological toll on the lives of Palestinians living there, according to the findings of a survey commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The phone survey, conducted during the last week of January, shows that unemployment in Gaza increased by 7 points since the outbreak of violence last December, rising from 36 percent to 43 percent. Full-time employment, already at a record low (50 percent), has declined further to 45 percent.

As this is a landline phone survey, collapsed houses could not be reached, and the likelihood of reaching severely damaged homes was also lower. Yet, 45 percent of those polled said that their homes were partially damaged from bullets, artillery shells or has shattered windows. In addition, more than a -third of those surveyed (38 percent) said they had been displaced from their homes, citing too much fighting in their neighbourhood as the main reason (67 percent).

The survey, with a random sample size of 1,815 households from the five governorates of the Gaza Strip, reveals that 75 percent of Gazans feel insecure, listing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (42 percent) and Israeli border control (27 percent) as the first and second causes for this insecurity.

Almost two-thirds of the households polled said they need assistance, identifying emotional and psychological aid as a top priority (28 percent) followed by employment (16 percent), housing (15 percent), financial support (14 percent) and medical attention (10 percent).

Half of respondents also identified emotional and psychological aid as the main need for children, citing signs of stress such as bedwetting, nightmares, aggressive behaviour and anxiety. Getting children back to school on a regular basis and providing them safe opportunities to play were key concerns reported by parents and guardians as well.

The survey also shows that all basic social services and public utilities, such as running water, solid waste removal, electricity, sanitation, hospitals/clinics and roads were hit hard during the conflict.

UNDP commissioned the survey in order to understand the recovery priorities of the Palestinian people living in Gaza. The survey's data will feed into a comprehensive damage and recovery needs assessment currently being conducted by the UN, in cooperation with national and international partners. UNDP, in its capacity as the facilitator of the UN and Partners Early Recovery Team, is coordinating the compilation and the analysis of all the data and information gathered.

“This assessment looks beyond the emergency humanitarian assistance and toward rebuilding the lives of Gaza's 1.4 million residents,” said Jens Toyberg-Frandzen, Special Representative for UNDP's Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People. “The findings of this assessment will contribute to the Gaza Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan, currently being drafted by the Palestinian Authority for the Gaza donor's conference to be hosted in Cairo on March 2nd.”

Initial findings of the UN's damage assessment indicated that Gaza's economy will require significant aid and will take years to fully recover. Two thirds of Gazans are currently living below the poverty line and the latest round of violence has exacerbated the situation further. Both the agriculture and private sectors received a major blow.

Nearly two thousand business establishments (56 percent) in heavily hit neighbourhoods have been completely destroyed.

Agriculture also suffered tremendous damage, with much of the agricultural infrastructure shattered, threatening the food security of Gazan residents. The military operation resulted in widespread razing of cultivated lands (18 percent), as well as the destruction of greenhouses, livestock (8 percent) and poultry farms, registered groundwater wells (13 percent), irrigation networks and other productive agricultural assets.

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Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People
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