

Joint Press Release

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## **More than 200 lives lost since UN call for ceasefire aid agencies say**

**Three hour lull in fighting will not redress the full-blown humanitarian crisis - only an immediate ceasefire will help**

A group of leading international aid agencies today said that more than 200 lives have been lost since the UN passed its binding resolution stipulating an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and Israel which was dismissed by the conflicting parties.

The agencies called on both parties to end the killings and heed Ban Ki Moon's appeal – as he arrives in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory - for an immediate ceasefire that will end the civilian suffering and endangerment and allow local and international aid agencies to provide desperately needed relief safely and without impediment. The international community must throw its full weight behind Ban Ki Moon's efforts and ensure that the UN resolution is promptly enforced.

**Since the UN Security Council called for a ceasefire on 8th January there have been:**

- More than 200 people killed
- More than 1,300 people injured
- Three hospitals hit by the bombing

“Putting an end to violence and civilian casualties is not a option, it is an obligation”, says Charles Clayton, Nation Director for World Vision Jerusalem. “We cannot stress enough that the current situation in the Gaza needs to be addressed without further delay. Too many people have died already.”

The agencies – Save the Children, Oxfam International, World Vision Jerusalem, Christian Aid, CARE International – added that the three-hour ‘lull’ in the fighting, which is now only restricted to Gaza City, detracts attention away from the immediate need to reach a durable ceasefire that would allow aid agencies to carry out much needed humanitarian work throughout the Gaza, including reaching communities that have been completely cut off by the conflict. The slim window of time each day is not nearly

enough to address the dire humanitarian situation on the ground. Moreover, some fighting usually continues during the 'lulls' so humanitarian workers and the civilian population risk their lives moving around the Gaza.

“With shelters overflowing, food shortages, inadequate facilities and the general sense of panic and abandonment felt, we must be allowed to sufficiently assist the needy population of the Gaza at once”, says David Bourns, Country Director for Save the Children.

Last week, CARE International staff were forced to flee a food distribution site as heavy bombing began to fall in the area. Distributions of food take at least five hours per delivery, and a daily delivery of medical supplies took 11 hours last week – far longer than the three-hour lull. Even with an increase in the number of workers packing and dispatching, the needs of clinics and hospitals can't be met in the short time frame.

World Vision has begun a substantial relief operation to bring food and blankets to 50,000 people who are in extreme need. This whole process will be jeopardized unless the organization is given safe and unfettered access into Gaza. The sequence of delivering aid from border to warehouse and from warehouse to the population is currently a big gamble in lives and material.

Despite the danger to staff and the children and families they are trying to reach, Save the Children has distributed food rations to 20,000 people — more than half of them children — since Sunday, January 4. Food distribution involves large quantities of supplies and vehicles and requires hours to complete efficiently. Reaching vulnerable people is complicated by the fact that families are often fearful to venture out to distribution sites. Save the Children has also warned that the number of supply trucks entering Gaza is entirely insufficient given the extraordinary need created by the conflict.

Oxfam International said that it is impossible to effectively circulate internally within Gaza during the 3-hour lull. Oxfam's seven staff members in Gaza, a majority of who have themselves been displaced due to the violence, are also struggling to deliver urgently-needed food to thousands of civilians in such a tight space of time. Oxfam's local health partners are providing emergency medical care to victims of the conflict, under extraordinarily difficult circumstances with the Palestinian health system on the brink of collapse.

“On the best days, the lulls are barely long enough to distribute a minimum of aid to the people who need it. In most cases, it's simply not sufficient time to provide adequate assistance for such a devastated and desperate civilian population. It's akin to putting a

band-aid on a bullet wound when surgery and life support is what is needed,” said John Prideaux-Brune, Country Director for Oxfam Great-Britain.