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NEWS RELEASE

FACT SHEET: GAZA STRIP WATER AND SANITATION SITUATION -- JANUARY 7, 2009

OVERVIEW

MAIN FINDINGS

Data, collected by the Gaza Coastal Municipal Water Utility (CMWU) and the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA), on the current Gaza Strip water and sanitation situation indicate a severe public health threat to the population of Gaza:

- (a) severe potable water shortages and escalating failure of sewage systems;
- (b) potential threat to the structural integrity of Beit Lahiya Sewage Lake, which could cause massive drowning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

Government of Israel (GOI) should recognize that the water and sanitation situation is a central component of the Gaza Strip humanitarian crisis and make arrangements to immediately facilitate:

- (a) fuel distribution to some 170 water and sewage pumps in Gaza to enable their operation;
- (b) maintenance of Beit Lahiya Sewage Lake and protection of its structural integrity.
- (c) restoration of regular electricity supply as soon as possible in order to reduce dependence on fuel for generators.

DETAILS

GENERAL GAZA STRIP WATER AND SANITATION

FINDINGS

- Nearly all sewage and water pumps are now out of operation due to lack of electricity and diminished fuel supplies to operate backup power generators. The water utility has extremely limited fuel reserves (just 10,000 liters as of today) which it is unable to distribute but which would enable only about one day of pumping if distributed. Stocks of spare parts and other maintenance supplies, already depleted before the military operations, are in urgent need of replenishment.
- Resulting shortage of potable water and sewage overflows in urban areas is becoming an imminent public health danger. As of today, nearly the entire population of Gaza is without running water and is dependent on their own stored water supplies and limited sales by private water distributors. Sewage has already flooded in some residential areas, particularly in Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya, where sewage pumps have been damaged.
- Fuel, even when made available at the Israel/ Gaza border, is not reaching pumps due to lack of secure transport while military operations continue.

RECOMMENDATION: GOI should immediately facilitate entry of fuel, spare parts and maintenance staff into territory and actively ensure their safe transport to water and sewage pumps operated by CMWU and PWA. In addition, an effort should be made to restore regular electricity supply as soon as possible in order to in order to reduce dependence on fuel for generators.

BEIT LAHIYA SEWAGE LAKE

FINDINGS

- Lake structure requires constant and vigilant maintenance under normal conditions. Pumps transferring sewage from the lake to infiltration basins, critical to the relief of pressure on structure, are not in operation due to lack of electricity and fuel. The integrity of the lake structure is endangered by the potential impact of nearby explosions and sonic booms and possible heavy rain.
- Failure of the lake structure would put about the 10,000 residents of the surrounding area in danger of drowning and spark a wider environmental and public health disaster.;

RECOMMENDATION: GOI should immediately facilitate entry of and safe transport of fuel, spare parts and PWA maintenance staff to the lake site. In addition to refraining from deliberately targeting the structure itself, a wide no-fire zone should be secured around lake.

FURTHER INFORMATION: CMWU in Gaza [+970-599-287-108 or +970-599-287-104] or PWA in Ramallah [+970-2-2409022]