

25 June 2021

### **AIDA Statement: Lift the Restrictions on Humanitarian Access to and within Gaza**

Over 50 INGOs from the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA) forum work in the Gaza Strip - many in partnership with national organizations - in the fields of health, WASH, education, protection, and gender among others. The majority of these organizations are facing increased restrictions since the 11-day hostilities in May which have impacted their ability to provide quick and quality assistance. **AIDA calls on donor states and the diplomatic community at large to intensify diplomatic pressure on Israel to immediately lift restrictions on humanitarian access to Gaza, and to expedite humanitarian relief and assistance for affected Palestinians. AIDA also calls on the donor and diplomatic community to proactively engage and persuade local authorities in the Gaza Strip to allow for humanitarian operations to continue unimpeded, in line with humanitarian principles which guide responses over the world.**

Since the announcement of the ceasefire on May 21 after the 11-day hostilities, Israel has continued to impose restrictions on Gaza crossings of both goods and people, directly impacting humanitarian access. Israel bans Palestinians from exiting or entering through the Erez crossing with the exception of urgent medical referrals. And only recently have we seen a small opening for Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Many urgent medical referrals were delayed and held up by the Israelis for an unacceptable period of time, leaving patients in need of critical care during the escalation, in a status of limbo. This restriction on the right to movement also limits the capacity of humanitarian organizations to support their programs with local personnel, who often have expertise and experience with prior humanitarian response efforts. In addition, only certain types of basic food products, medical supplies, fodder and fuel are allowed to cross through the Kerem Shalom crossing. Only recently, limited goods have been able to exit Gaza into the West Bank or Israel. The imposition of restrictions on the entry of humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in the Gaza strip is at odds with Israel's obligation to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief to civilians in need and is especially troubling given the dire humanitarian situation.

AIDA echoes and supports the Key Humanitarian Requests as outlined by the Humanitarian Coordinator, Lynn Hastings, in her June 19th letter to the Israeli authorities. The provision of the aforementioned priorities (access for medical patients, access for staff, and the access of humanitarian supplies) are essential for humanitarian work to be carried out with expedience and effectiveness. The same is true for the unimpeded access to conduct assessments, collect data, and coordinate responses across sectors within Gaza, absent of political interference or undue political pressures.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza should not be assessed solely in relation to the May 2021 hostilities reviewed. The Gaza Strip has been under Israeli siege - comprised of a maritime and air blockade and land closure - for the last 14-years that has inflicted devastating and wide-ranging effects on Palestinians' lives. During these 14-years, the Gaza Strip faced four Israeli military offenses. The physical damage that these offenses wrought on the civilian population have not been fully reconstructed, nor has it been possible to fully recover from the mental and emotional damage incurred. These severe restrictions persist despite the global COVID-19 pandemic, which adds further strain on Gaza with its limited resources and limited access to vaccines.

The humanitarian needs of Palestinians in Gaza remain acute, where humanitarian assistance is at its utmost importance. Abiding by our humanitarian principles, the NGO community is committed to continuing its work in the Gaza Strip to deliver critical humanitarian assistance.