

CARE medical shipment permitted into Gaza *Struggling health system on the verge of collapse*

Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territory (Dec. 31, 2008) – Three CARE cargo trucks carrying life-saving medical supplies to Gaza were granted permission to enter the beleaguered territory late last night, one of the few transports to access the area since the Israeli bombardment of Gaza began Dec. 27. More supplies are urgently needed to treat wounded civilians. CARE calls for an immediate ceasefire and unfettered humanitarian access.

With 100,000€ funding from ECHO, CARE is purchasing additional essential medicines and supplies to distribute to hospitals and ambulance stations in Gaza. Within hours of the first Israeli air strikes, CARE had already distributed US\$20,000 worth of pharmaceuticals and medical disposables to the Al Ahli Arab hospital and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society hospital and ambulance stations.

“We have been trying for more than a month and a half to get this shipment into Gaza and are relieved that it is finally going through. Gaza’s health system is at the breaking point after 19 months of blockade and is overwhelmed with casualties. Hospitals and clinics lack pharmaceuticals such as anesthetic and cleaning fluid, spare parts and basic equipment as well as electricity. The list goes on,” said Martha Myers, CARE’s Country Director for CARE International in Gaza and the West Bank. “More than 87 per cent of the patients in hospital today are in critical condition. Patients have been treated on the floor because there are not enough beds.”

There are shortages of clean bed linen and relatives are bringing sheets in with the wounded. Electricity shortages are forcing hospitals to use generators and precious stocks of fuel which means doctors are having to make choices about who to treat based on considerations of power consumption. More than 380 people have died and 1750 more injured in the Israeli air strikes in the past four days. Many of the injured will be maimed for life. Doctors and health staff are working around the clock.

“The three trucks CARE have sent in will make a difference, but we need steady and consistent access for humanitarian, medical and emergency supplies to reach the people in need,” said Myers. “A vulnerable civilian population, 56% of whom are children under the age of 18, is now being pummeled. Unfettered humanitarian access must be granted immediately. It is cold and pouring with rain in Gaza.”

CARE plans to expand its emergency response further today with the purchase of blankets, plastic sheeting to cover broken windows, and heaters for people whose homes have been damaged or who have been displaced by the bombing.

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About CARE: *CARE is one of the world’s largest humanitarian aid agencies, providing assistance in nearly 70 countries. CARE has been working in Gaza since 1948, implementing programs in food security, health and water, support for civil society groups, and distributions of fresh food.*

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