

Press Release, Sunday, June 17, 2007

**Btselem: The Israeli Center for Human Right in the Occupied Territories
Gisha: Legal Center for Freedom of Movement
Association for Civil Rights in Israel
Physicians for Human Rights
Public Committee against Torture in Israel
Center for the Defence of the Individual
Yesh Din – Volunteers for Human Rights
Rabbis for Human Rights**

**Urgent Appeal from Israeli Human Rights Groups to Defense Minister:
Open Gaza's Borders to Prevent a Humanitarian Crisis**

As we write these lines, hundreds of refugees are trapped between Erez crossing, which is sealed, and a group of Hamas extremists who are preventing their return to Gaza. The sick and those injured from recent events are trapped in Gaza. Essential food products are diminishing, and there is a growing shortage of essential medical supplies. The state of Israel can not stand idly by at a time when the fundamental human rights of Gaza residents are being violated and the right to life is being threatened.

Eight Israeli human rights organizations today warn of a crisis which has the potential of worsening if Israel continues to close borders and isolate Gaza from the outside world by preventing the supply of essential goods, trapping residents inside the Gaza Strip and preventing Gaza residents who traveled outside the Strip from returning home.

Over the weekend, Israel closed the border crossings between the Gaza Strip and the outside world. Karni Crossing, Gaza's main artery through which essential supplies are transferred, is closed for the sixth day. Fresh food, such as meat, fruit and dairy products, have begun to diminish from the shelves. The World Food Program warns of food shortages by the end of the week if the crossings are not opened. Today, Nahal Oz, the passage way through which fuel is provided to the Gaza Strip, is closed.

Rafah Crossing has been closed for eight days and Erez crossing has been closed since yesterday. Gaza residents who left the Strip are unable to return home and reunite with

their families. Gaza residents seeking to leave to receive medical treatment in Egypt or Israel, including the chronically sick or those injured due to recent events, are trapped within Gaza. Even though a small number of blood rations arrived in the last few days to Gaza through Erez crossing, the shortage of essential medical supplies is worsening. Hundreds of refugees are attempting to escape the violence and are trapped in Erez Crossing, caught between IDF soldiers and the military wing of Hamas which is preventing these refugees from returning to Gaza.

The state of Israel can not stand idly by at a time when fundamental human rights of Gaza residents are being violated, including the most essential of all rights – the right to life and physical integrity.

Israel controls land crossings between Gaza and Israel, Gaza's air space and territorial waters, and does not allow the crossing of people or goods via the sea or air. To a great extent, Israel is exercising control of the border between Gaza and Egypt and control over the borders of the West Bank, to which refugees are trying to escape from Gaza. The closing of borders and the threat of disconnecting Gaza's electricity and water grid can be interpreted as collective punishment for all Gaza residents.

We call upon the state of Israel to fulfill its obligation under international law and to open the borders of Gaza to the outside world. We call upon the State of Israel to allow those whose lives are in danger to leave the Gaza Strip immediately and to enter the West Bank. We call upon the State of Israel to allow the sick and injured to access needed medical treatment in Israel and Egypt. We call upon Israel to open the land borders with the Gaza Strip to allow the entrance of humanitarian supplies, especially fuel, medicines and essential supplies.