

World Vision US Statement for Constituencies Engaged in Israel/Palestine: The Lives of Innocent Children Must Be Protected

August 1, 2014

- **Five World Vision Registered Children Killed in Gaza**
- **More than 4,000 World Vision Sponsored Children are Displaced**
- **World Vision and 56 other International organizations call for a lasting ceasefire and a durable and just peace**

World Vision calls on the government of Israel, Hamas, and armed groups to immediately cease all hostilities, which are disproportionately endangering children and other civilians. In this call, we join 56 other international organizations seeking public support for a ceasefire in a campaign that reached more than seven million people. World Vision US calls on the United States government and Secretary Kerry to assert pressure to promote a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. A durable and just peace must also be pursued. The lives of innocent children must be protected.

On July 30, 2014, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported the shelling of a United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) Girls School in Jabalia where four children and at least 15 people were killed, more than 130 people were injured. World Vision Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza was planning to conduct psycho-social support for the displaced children at the school on the morning after it was hit by Israeli mortars. One registered child in World Vision's programs was killed in this attack. UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl reported from Jerusalem regarding the incident: "Last night, children were killed as they slept next to their parents on the floor of a classroom in a UN designated shelter in Gaza. Children killed in their sleep; this is an affront to all of us, a source of universal shame."

World Vision condemns the bombing of civilian infrastructures, particularly those such as the UNRWA schools, which house displaced children. To date, 137 schools have been damaged by shelling. The misuse of schools, by Hamas and other militant groups for the storage of and firing of weapons in civilian areas is unacceptable. Children are being particularly affected by this dispute. Thus far, 1,373 Palestinian civilians have been killed, of whom 252 were children. To date, five World Vision sponsored children have been killed in the current conflict.

The numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Gaza is increasing daily. OCHA reports 250,000 people are being hosted in UNRWA and registered government schools. More than 4,000 of World Vision's registered children in Gaza have been displaced. The borders of the Gaza Strip are closed on all sides, making it difficult for citizens to flee the violence.

Israeli military strikes are devastating the infrastructure of communities creating an increasingly catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza. Schools, hospitals, water infrastructure, and homes have been completely destroyed. UN schools providing emergency shelter are overflowing, sewage is flooding streets, children and families are in desperate need of food, water, and a safe place to sleep. Health facilities and emergency rooms are in crisis over the lack of fuel and medical supplies. Presently, at least 303,000 children are in need of psychosocial support.

In Israel, indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza continues to endanger the lives of Israeli civilians, and children are living under the fear of rocket attacks. As of July 31, 59 Israelis have been killed, including two civilians and 56 soldiers, in addition to one foreign national.

"The violence has to stop now. Children are paying the price for adults' mistakes. We can't reach the thousands of children we know need help. There needs to be an immediate and lasting ceasefire so that we can attend to the humanitarian crisis on the ground," says Alex Snary, National Director of Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza.

World Vision has temporarily suspended its normal program operations in Gaza. However, we are carrying out emergency response interventions; mainly providing psychosocial support to more than 400 children who are injured or have lost a loved one in the attacks. We have procured much needed medical supplies for a hospital in north Gaza and provided food parcels to 200 families.

"Children are precious in the eyes of God," says Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, Senior Director of Advocacy and Outreach for World Vision US. "Our government and political leaders engaged in this conflict must do everything within their power to protect the lives of innocent children who are literally being caught in the crossfire and continue to suffer the devastating consequences of the increasing humanitarian disaster in Gaza."

Editor's Note:

- World Vision is serving some 90,000 people in Gaza, including more than 7,000 children registered in its programs.
- 1,373 Palestinians have been killed, including 252 children
- 59 Israelis have been killed, including 2 civilians and 1 foreign national
- As many as 457,000 people are displaced in Gaza, including the 250,000 that are in UNRWA and government shelters
- 68 Families have lost three or more family members in the same incident, totaling 360 fatalities.
- 9,765 families' homes were totally destroyed or sustained major damage
- 303,000 Children in need of psychosocial support
- 137 schools were damaged during hostilities, some of which serve as emergency shelters
- 1.8 million people in Gaza are affected by halt or reduction of water supply.
- 2 Hours of electricity per day only throughout Gaza.

From OCHA Situation Report 30 July (1500 hrs) to 31 July (1500 hrs)

World Vision works where the human needs are greatest and where there are the highest levels of poverty. Our response to this crisis reflects the economic realities of the region, not a political or national bias. The per capita GDP of Israel is US\$36,200¹, as opposed to US \$2,530² for Gaza and the West Bank. World Vision also works alongside Israeli organizations committed to promoting peace and justice in the Holy Land.

¹ CIA World Factbook. 2013 Estimate. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html>.

² World Bank. 2012 Estimate. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>