

## **MEDIA RELEASE for Immediate Release**

### **Aid agencies warn of humanitarian catastrophe if Gaza is attacked.**

Today (27 December 2008) aid agencies and human rights groups working in Gaza called on Israel, Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups to pull back from the brink of an all-out military confrontation.

The aid agencies warn that a full-scale military incursion would have disastrous consequences for civilians already living in acute conditions as a result of the 18 month Israeli blockade on Gaza and seriously worsen the security situation for Israeli residents who have come under attacks from rocket-fire.

**“Gaza has already been paralysed by the Israeli blockade. A military attack on Gaza could completely destroy essential infrastructure for sewage treatment, water provision and electricity for hospitals and homes, with devastating impact on civilians,”** said Jeremy Hobbs, Director of Oxfam International.

The aid agencies and human rights groups - Oxfam, CARE International, CAFOD, Medico International and Diakonia - offer a bleak assessment of the consequences of military action and warn of a possible humanitarian catastrophe in its wake.

**“The ability of people in Gaza to provide for themselves has been absolutely crippled. Our governments need to help all parties to the conflict find a genuine and lasting solution. A military offensive will hit ordinary people – the very people we need as partners in building a better future for the region. Military action will alienate Gaza further and the consequences of this would be disastrous”** said Jeremy Hobbs, Director of Oxfam International.

The aid agencies condemned all attacks on civilians and called on the international community to speak out against the disproportionate use of force by any side.

**“The cessation of violence was not perfect but it brought some calm to ordinary people on both sides. There is no military solution to the situation and the upsurge in violence destroys hopes for peace, refuelling the cycle of violence. There is simply no alternative to negotiations to address the root causes of the conflict,”** said Martha Myers, Country Director for West Bank and Gaza for CARE International.

Aid agencies are deeply critical of the Israeli government’s continued refusal to bring an end to the blockade of Gaza and of its increased restrictions on humanitarian access witnessed since early November, and regret the Egyptian government’s inability to negotiate an opening to the Rafah crossing.

**“The blockade of Gaza is illegal and constitutes collective punishment of ordinary men, women and children. Humanitarian access cannot be used as a political tool. We condemn unequivocally the rocket attacks into Israel and warn in the strongest terms against any massive military response on the part of Israel,”** said Christoffer Sjöholm, Regional Manager for Diakonia.

## **ENDS**

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