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**PRESS RELEASE**

**United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator calls for an end to Israeli restrictions on free movement of people and goods in the Gaza Strip**

**Gaza, 3 July 2013**

The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. James W. Rawley today urged the Government of Israel to lift the long-term restrictions, including the blockade of Gaza in place since 2007. Seeking to highlight the particular impact of these restrictions on livelihoods, Mr. Rawley led a visit of humanitarian agencies and international representatives to meet with Palestinian fishermen and farmers to learn first-hand how they are affected and what can be done to address the challenges they face.

“The cumulative impact of Israel’s restrictions, some of which have been in place for more than a decade, has devastated the livelihoods of families in Gaza, such as the farmers and fishermen we met today”, said Mr. Rawley. “These restrictions affect the poorest the most; they impede development of a sustainable economy and increase dependency on aid”, he said. Recent assessments indicate that 57% of people in Gaza do not have money to buy sufficient food and 80% of families receive some form of international aid. The economy is effectively kept alive through public expenditure, international aid and the illegal tunnel trade, in which thousands of workers, some of them children, continue to risk their lives every day.

Long-term restrictions on access to as much as 35% of Gaza’s agricultural land and currently more than two-thirds of its fishing areas have resulted in estimated annual economic losses of over \$76m. The continued ban on the transfer of produce and other goods from Gaza to its traditional markets in the West Bank and Israel has effectively prevented sustainable economic growth; less than one truckload of goods per day (on average) exited Gaza in the first half of 2013, compared to 38 during the first half of 2007 before the imposition of the closure. “While there has been some improvement in access to land and sea areas following the 21 November 2012 ceasefire agreement, only a full lifting of restrictions on access, as well as on exports and transfers of produce, will enable recovery of the fishing and agricultural sectors and the livelihoods of those who depend upon them”, Mr. Rawley said. Mr. Rawley also expressed concern that measures undertaken to enforce access restrictions on land and at sea continue to place Palestinian farmers, fishermen and other civilians at serious physical risk.

Noting that the UN has repeatedly condemned the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Palestinian armed groups towards Israel, Mr. Rawley said, "Israel has legitimate security concerns. Any response to such concerns, including limitations on the free movement of people and goods, must comply with international law; they must be proportionate to a specific threat and must not be punitive in nature. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have the capacity to develop their communities and to build a sustainable local economy. Only the full lifting of these long-term restrictions will enable them to do so". [Ends]

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