

Statement by UNICEF Deputy Executive Director for Humanitarian Action and Supply Operations Ted Chaiban on the near-blockade of aid and access in North Gaza

18 October 2024

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NEW YORK, 18 October 2024 - "The situation in northern Gaza is extremely grave.

Renewed mass forced displacement, increased conflict, and ongoing military obstruction that amounts to an effective-blockade has cut off hundreds of thousands of children and families from vital humanitarian aid.

"The number of aid trucks entering the north has reduced to an unacceptable trickle, pushing an already weakened population into deeper suffering. Since early October, only 80 trucks have been able to reach northern Gaza, compared to over 460 trucks during the same period in September – a catastrophic decline in humanitarian access for the 400,000 people trapped in the north, most of whom are children and women.

"The stories emerging from the ground are haunting and heartbreaking. Families are running out of food, water is critically scarce, and basic sanitation and hygiene supplies are no longer available. Tragic reports of children burned, killed, and maimed. Acute malnutrition in northern Gaza has reached alarming levels, and over 2,000 children who were receiving treatment might have had their care interrupted. Every missed day of treatment could be fatal.

"The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis confirms our worst fears for children in northern Gaza. Nearly 1 in 5 children suffer from wasting, the most life-threatening form of malnutrition. This is due to the prolonged deprivation of food, water, and essential aid, including foods and nutrition supplements for young children. If the intense fighting, forced displacement, and continued blockage of humanitarian assistance persist, the risk of famine will escalate rapidly in the coming months.

"This looming disaster could lead to the loss of countless young lives unless immediate and unhindered humanitarian access is granted to deliver life-saving support. The world must act now to prevent this catastrophe from becoming a full-scale famine.

"Last month I was in Gaza and heard first-hand from hospital staff, including in Kamal Adwan – the only facility in the north with a pediatric unit, where critically ill children are being treated in increasingly desperate conditions. Newborns in incubators, children with life-threatening conditions, and patients in intensive care remain at severe risk as medical supplies run out and the hospital struggles to function without fuel or clean water.

“The trauma these children are enduring is unimaginable. Many have been displaced multiple times, forced to flee their homes again and again with nowhere safe to go. Children with disabilities or medical conditions are particularly vulnerable, facing life-threatening risks as the conflict intensifies. For these children, the lack of safe shelter, medical care, and basic supplies is nothing short of a nightmare.

“The blockade has also brought commercial traffic to a near halt, there is no market left in the north. Humanitarian aid alone cannot meet the needs of an entire population – children and families must have access to goods through commercial channels to survive.

“UNICEF is calling for the immediate lifting of aid restrictions in northern Gaza, the resumption of commercial traffic, the approval of additional routes for the safe transport of cargo, the protection of humanitarian workers, and for unhindered access for humanitarian aid. The restrictions on aid must be removed to ensure that children can receive the food, water, soap, and medical care they desperately need. Without immediate action, we risk losing an entire generation to preventable causes – starvation, disease, and a lack of basic health services.

“Finally, beyond the entry of trucks and access to the north of Gaza, UNICEF needs the Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to remain on the ground as the indispensable and irreplaceable arm of the humanitarian response. Since the onset of conflict over a year ago, UNRWA has been crucial in delivering lifesaving aid to the Palestinian population, who are heavily dependent on its services.

“Failure means abandoning children in Gaza to an unimaginable fate. Time is running out, but we can still act.”