

UN agency says water is a matter of life and death for Gaza

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United Nations, October 14 (RHC)-- The United Nations refugee agency for Palestinians has said water has now become a “matter of life and death” for people in the Gaza Strip after Israel cut their water supplies. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said on Saturday that more than two million people are now at risk as water runs out.

“It has become a matter of life and death. It is a must: fuel needs to be delivered now into Gaza to make water available for two million people,” said UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini. No humanitarian supplies have been allowed into Gaza for a week now, according to the agency.

Clean water is running out in the Gaza Strip as its water plant and public water networks stopped working. Palestinians are now forced to use dirty water from wells, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. Israel has also enforced an electricity blackout on Gaza since Wednesday, which has impacted the water supply.

Meanwhile, thousands have moved out of northern Gaza after Israel ordered them to do so amid its air attacks, something the UN called “impossible”. Nearly one million people have been displaced since last week.

“We need to truck fuel into Gaza now. Fuel is the only way for people to have safe drinking water. If not, people will start dying of severe dehydration, among them young children, the elderly and women. Water is now the last remaining lifeline. I appeal for the siege on humanitarian assistance to be lifted now,” added Lazzarini.

Last Friday, the Palestinian armed group Hamas launched a surprise multi-pronged assault on Israel, which killed at least 1,300 people.

Israel then began pounding the enclave of Gaza, dropping thousands of bombs that have killed at least 2,215 Palestinians.

UNRWA also said its shelters in Gaza are no longer safe, something it called “unprecedented.” “Wars have rules. Civilians, hospitals, schools, clinics and United Nations premises cannot be a target. UNRWA is sparing no efforts to advocate with parties to the conflicts to meet their obligations under international law to protect civilians including those seeking refuge in UNRWA shelters,” it said.

“This war should be no exception. Protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure including UN buildings applies to this conflict, too.”

Efforts are under way by organisations and governments to deliver humanitarian assistance to many, including hundreds of thousands of children, who urgently need it.

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