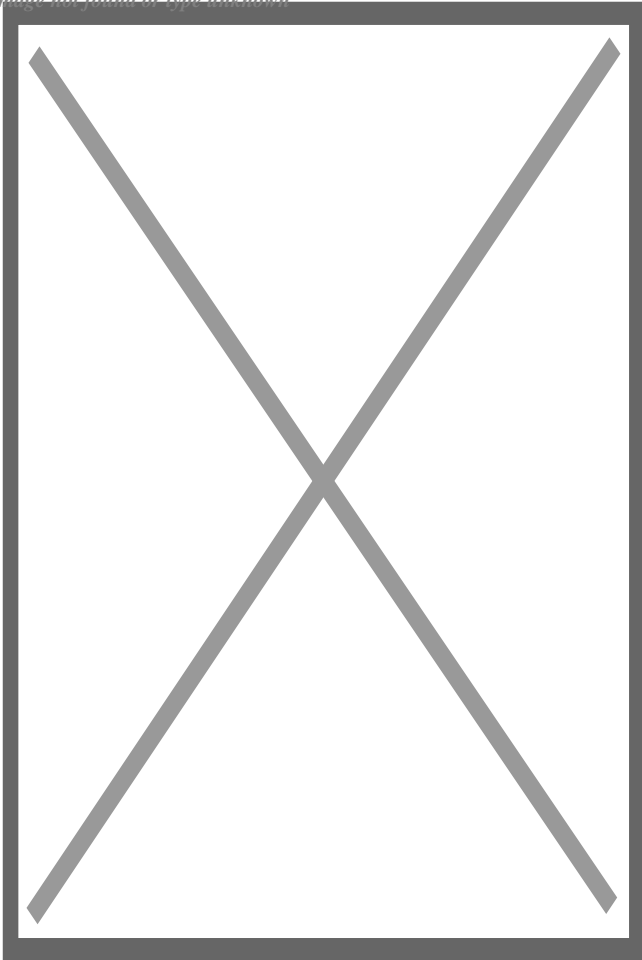


UNRWA chief says Israel is clearly weaponizing aid into Gaza

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Geneva, March 11 (RHC)-- Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), has condemned Israel's blockade on humanitarian aid entering Gaza, as well as its decision to cut off electricity to the Palestinian enclave.

"I don't know what the real intent is, but whatever the intent is, it is clearly a weaponization of humanitarian aid," he said at a news conference in Geneva, Switzerland.

The UNRWA chief on Monday warned that the Israeli aid blockade into Gaza could bring back "the deepening hunger" to the besieged strip, calling resumption of aid critical.

"I think the more we go ahead (with aid blockade), the more we will see the impact increasing on the population, and obviously the risk is that we go back to the situation we experienced months ago about deepening hunger in the Gaza Strip," Philippe Lazzarini told a press briefing in Geneva.

It is "critical" that humanitarian aid is allowed into Gaza again to maintain the progress made during the first phase of the ceasefire and meet people's basic needs, Lazzarini said.

"If you block all the entry points, you create a situation where you use basic humanitarian assistance and food as an instrument to achieve a political goal or military goal, which is contrary to any international humanitarian norm," he added.

He also said that the recent electricity cut by Israel will reduce "significantly" the availability of drinking water as the desalination plant, which benefits from this electricity, was producing drinking water for 600,000 people. "So that would be a direct impact on the population," he said.

He also touched on the situation in the West Bank and said that several refugee camps have been nearly emptied, displacing around 40,000 Palestinian refugees. "This is the largest displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank since 1967," he underlined.

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