PRESS RELEASE

Infant Mortality In Gaza No Longer In Decline
"Alarming Trend" According to New Report by UNRWA

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Jerusalem

According to a new study by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, infant mortality, which in most parts of the world is in decreasing, has not declined for the last decade in Gaza. The paper entitled "Stalled decline in infant mortality among Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip since 2006" was published today in the Plos One journal.

According to the Director of UNRWA's Health Department, Dr Akihiro Seita, "this is an extraordinary warning sign, an alarming trend in the overall situation not only of health for infants but also the health of entire Palestine refugee population in Gaza. Moreover, it is a warning sign on the overall social and economic situation of Gaza, as the Palestine refugees account for more than seventy per cent of the entire populations in Gaza. Infant mortality is a barometer of the health of an entire population".

The new study found that the infant mortality rate among Palestine refugees in Gaza was 22.7 per 1000 live births. This is within the same range of the previously reported rate of 22.4 per 1000 live births in 2015 and 20.2 per 1000 live births from the study conducted in 2006.

"This finding needs our attention since the ultimate goal is to maintain a continuing decline of infant mortality and to stop preventable infant deaths. Gaza was not able to meet the Millennium Development Goal Four for a reduction of under-five child mortality by two thirds. Efforts should be made to achieve the new Sustainable Development Goal target of a neonatal mortality rate of below 12 per 1000 live births in 2030", said Dr Seita.

In Gaza, the socioeconomic situation has deteriorated dramatically in the past decade following the imposition of the blockade and subsequent conflicts. The blockade has affected the health sector in Gaza, as hospitals continue to lack adequate physical infrastructure, drugs, supplies, and infection prevention material. It is reasonable to assume that the unstable power supply, the deteriorating functionality of medical equipment, the periodic shortages of essential drugs and medical consumables have had an impact on the quality of medical care with a consequent impact on infant mortality.

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UNRWA

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA programme budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall. UNRWA encourages all Member States to work collectively to exert all possible efforts to fully fund the Agency's programme budget. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals.

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA across its five fields of operation. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.

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