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Food operations in Gaza face growing challenges as ongoing conflict keeps hunger needs high

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CAIRO – Ten months into the war, Palestinians in Gaza are crowded into an ever-shrinking space without adequate sanitation or healthcare and are repeatedly uprooted by evacuation orders that also disrupt the aid centres intended to support them, including the food distributions and community kitchens supported by the UN World Food Programme (WFP).

WFP's operations are severely hampered by intensifying conflict, the limited number of border crossings and damaged roads. In the last two months, amid continuing catastrophic hunger, WFP has had to reduce the contents of food parcels in Gaza as inflows of aid dipped and supplies dwindled. With two, or occasionally three, border crossings open, roughly half of the required food assistance entered Gaza in July. August is set to end with a similar result.

WFP is also warning about the state of the war-scarred roads it uses to transport food assistance around Gaza. The shell craters and debris make driving slow and challenging for truck drivers even in dry weather. In two months, when rain and flooding is expected, most roads will become unusable.

"Alongside the desperate needs of today, we must think about what's coming. We won't be able to bring food to the people of Gaza unless urgent repairs are done on these roads. We must be able to bring in the heavy machinery that is needed and work with communities so we have the labour to fix the roads before the rain comes," said WFP Palestine Country Director Antoine Renard.

Most Palestinians in Gaza are now displaced and living in tents or make-shift huts, often in areas prone to flooding. Because of evacuation orders, they are also trying to find safety in increasingly small spaces, where basic services have collapsed, and conditions make outbreaks of disease likely.

"Transporting food, water, medicine and hygiene equipment is critical for the survival of communities in Gaza today and will be needed for months to come. Roads are part of this lifeline. We must have the necessary security guarantees so that our staff and service

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uent refusals when they ask for permission to move. Looting and problems of public order are also frequent, especially when convoys have to wait for hours at holding points.

In the last two months, WFP has managed to bring in only half of the 24,000 MT of food aid required for operations serving 1.1 million people.

WFP operations in Gaza include food parcels and flour to families in shelters, hot meals, support to bakeries, special nutritional products for mothers and small children, and nutritional snacks for children in special safe areas set up by UNICEF.

For the first time last week, WFP-supported community kitchens in northern Gaza are providing hot meals with fresh vegetables (potatoes and onions). This first delivery is part of WFP's efforts to bring in nutritious fresh produce to supplement the emergency food rations that families have survived on for months and stave off malnutrition.

Apart from food parcels and hot meals for immediate relief, WFP is also working on more sustainable solutions to help families cope.

Given the high prices of food as a result of the war, WFP is testing out a cash assistance programme in the Deir Al Balah area in the central Gaza that will enable people to buy the food that meets their families' basic needs while injecting liquidity into Gaza's battered economy at the same time.

# # #

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