WFP Appeals for Rapid Expansion of Humanitarian Access to Gaza

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*The Executive Director of WFP, Josette Sheeran, today expressed deepening concern about the severe breakdown of food supplies and distributions in Gaza, and said the agency would scale up its operations to respond to urgent needs.*

WFP plans to broaden its reach to provide food assistance to up to 360,000 of the non-refugee population in Gaza, while the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) will meet food requirements among the refugee population that numbers 1.1 million people.  
“The situation in Gaza is dire with at least 80 per cent of the people needing urgent food assistance,” Sheeran said at Rafah, on the Egyptian border with Gaza, where she had travelled to hear at first hand the humanitarian challenges on the ground.  
Sheeran has despatched a senior WFP team to Jerusalem to meet the Israeli authorities and urge them to grant freer humanitarian access to Gaza so that WFP can respond to the immediate food needs.  
“It’s critical that WFP and all humanitarian workers have free and unfettered access to the people of Gaza at this difficult time,” Sheeran said, adding that food supplies were waiting in warehouses to be distributed to the hungry.  
WFP staff in Gaza have continued working to reach the hungry among the non-refugee population throughout the latest upsurge in fighting. Despite ongoing insecurity, the agency has reached more than 70,000 people over the past two weeks, carrying out food distributions during pauses in the conflict, delivering urgently needed food supplies to hospitals, and providing wheat flour to bakeries that remain open.  
Civilians are finding it increasingly difficult to find food in Gaza, with few commodities available on local markets and many people too frightened to leave their homes. Bakeries have also been running out of the wheat flour needed to produce bread - the staple food for people living in Gaza - and flour mills have run out of wheat grain.  
WFP has food stocks of 3,500 metric tons located in warehouses in Gaza – enough to feed the new caseload of up to 360,000 for around three weeks. But WFP’s ability to distribute food assistance has been severely limited by the high levels of insecurity. Many truck drivers, and fork-lift truck operators have been unwilling to work due to concerns about their safety and this has severely hampered the agency’s ability to get food to where it is needed most.  
130 trucks carrying around 4,000 metric tons of WFP food are ready to deliver into Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing point, but due to the insecurity, a limited capacity to move these supplies on the Gaza side of the border has meant that only a restricted amount of food has gone through.  
WFP is calling for all crossing points into the Gaza Strip to be opened to facilitate the flow of food assistance, and is appealing especially for a conveyor belt at Karni crossing to be re-started as this helps to reduce the time taken to deliver food supplies across the border into Gaza.