WFP Launches Operation Lifeline Gaza to Get Food to the Hungry

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*WFP today responded to growing hunger needs in Gaza by launching Operation Lifeline Gaza, a global appeal to ramp up the distribution of food to people caught in the conflict in the occupied Palestinian territory.*

“We are in the business of feeding hungry people in difficult situations - in earthquake zones, droughts, or after tsunamis - but Gaza presents one of the toughest challenges we have faced because access to the hungry is so limited,” said Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of WFP, adding that Operation Lifeline Gaza aims to meet growing hunger needs by providing ready-to-eat, culturally acceptable food to hundreds of thousands of people.

Sheeran, who went to the Egyptian border with Gaza on Friday, made the announcement after meetings with the head of the Egyptian Red Crescent, Suzanne Mubarak, and the Egyptian Minister of Trade and Industry, Rachid Mohamed Rachid. The Egyptian government, which gathered a large number of Egyptian companies in Cairo at the launch of the new initiative, has pledged to facilitate Operation Lifeline Gaza by offering assistance to companies that can provide food to WFP.

“We are proposing an immediate, innovative solution to hunger in an unusually challenging situation, where many people are suffering from a complete breakdown in access to food and clean water,” Sheeran said. “Even in the limited windows of opportunity when we can distribute food we have to remember that many people lack the means to cook and prepare meals for their families.”

“The World Food Programme has a long experience in dealing with this kind of situation both inside and outside Gaza,” said Rachid Mohamed Rachid, the Egyptian Minister of Trade. “People in Gaza need special kinds of food aid and Egypt will work under the umbrella of the World Food Programme to supply those foods to them.”

WFP has made repeated appeals for a rapid expansion of humanitarian access to Gaza, where people are finding it increasingly difficult to find food. Despite high levels of insecurity, WFP staff in Gaza have continued working throughout the conflict, providing food assistance to more than 75,000 people since the latest upsurge in fighting.

While WFP has food stocks sufficient to feed almost 360,000 people for the next three weeks, the heavy fighting has limited the possibility of wide-scale distributions. Many truck drivers and fork lift truck operators have been unwilling to work due to the insecurity and the civilian population is often too frightened to go to food distribution points.