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CMEP to Secretary Clinton on Gaza Water Crisis

(September 24, 2009)

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The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary,

We write to you with grave concern regarding the water crisis in Gaza. The United Nations' Humanitarian Coordinator recently reported that approximately 60 percent of Gaza's population does not have continuous access to water, and some 10,000 have no access to the water network.

In addition, the UN spokesman reports that 13 – 21 million gallons of untreated waste-water are being dumped daily into the Mediterranean Sea due to damage to sewage treatment facilities, lack of treatment capacity because of postponed plant upgrade projects, and a critical shortage of fuel and electricity necessary to operate them.

The pre-existing water and sanitation problems in Gaza were made worse as a result of the destruction during the recent military conflict. Most significantly, the closure of Gaza crossing points since June 2007 has prevented the supplies and equipment needed for the construction, maintenance and operation of water and sanitation facilities from entering Gaza. According to the September 15 United Nations' report, "the blockade significantly weakened the capacities of the population and of the health, water and other public sectors to react to the emergency created by the military operations."

This report also notes that —As long as Israel has control of the transfer of necessities and the supply of humanitarian needs to the Gaza Strip, it is bound by the obligations of international humanitarian law to allow the civilian population to have access, inter alia, to medical facilities, food and water, as well as additional humanitarian items."

In view of this situation numerous non-governmental organizations have called for immediate steps to ensure entry into Gaza of the construction and repair materials needed to adequately address the water and sanitary crisis.

Similarly, in June 2009 an ecumenical letter to President Obama signed by 55 major U.S. religious leaders called for the ". . . immediate relief for the population of Gaza—living in rubble and without basic necessities—by ending restrictions on humanitarian goods and opening the borders to reconstruction material, commerce and transit in a secure manner."

Accordingly, Churches for Middle East Peace urges the United States to exert every effort to address the water crisis by ending restrictions on humanitarian goods and opening Gaza's borders in a secure manner to reconstruction and repair materials.

Yours truly,

Warren Clark
Executive Director

Jim Fine
Chair of the Board

