**Israeli authorities must stop collective punishment of Palestinians and use of aid as a tool of war**

**JERUSALEM** - Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) strongly condemns the Israeli-imposed siege on the Gaza Strip, Palestine, which is depriving people of basic services and critical supplies, including access to water by cutting electricity supply on 9 March. Israeli authorities have instrumentalised humanitarian needs by using it as a bargaining chip, such as cutting the electricity supply to the Strip and preventing all aid from entering. This policy, which amounts to collective punishment, must be immediately stopped. MSF calls on Israeli authorities to respect international humanitarian law and uphold its responsibilities as an occupying power, and to end this inhumane blockade of the Strip.

Israel's allies have purposefully ignored this grave violation of international humanitarian law and normalised this conduct. MSF also urges Israel’s allies, including the United States, to refrain from normalising such actions and to act decisively to prevent Gaza from plunging further into devastation.

“Israeli authorities are yet again normalising the use of aid as a negotiation tool. This is outrageous. Humanitarian aid should never be used as a bargaining chip in war,” says Myriam Laaroussi, MSF emergency coordinator. “The blockade on all supplies is inevitably hurting hundreds of thousands of people and is having deadly consequences.”

At a moment in which the ceasefire should mean a scale up of the humanitarian response, the Israeli authorities have brought the entry of all aid to a screeching halt. The last supplies our teams were able to get into Gaza were three trucks of mostly medical supplies on 27 February. MSF has several trucks that were planned to cross into the Strip before the blockade.

MSF teams are trying to scale-up the response in Gaza, especially in the north where people have been deprived of basic needs for months.

“Gaza is now left without entry of fuel,” says Laaroussi. “Our hands are tied, and with no supply pipeline it makes it even more difficult to assist to the people of Gaza once our stocks run out. A ceasefire without scaling up humanitarian aid is contradictory.”

At the same time, the Israeli government’s suspension of electricity supply to the Strip has already forced the main water desalination plant in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, to run on fuel. The plant has dropped its production from 17 million to 2.5 million litres per day. This decision to cut electricity will therefor gradually severely impact the public water supply.

Israel’s siege that started on 9 October 2023, left hundreds of thousands of people in Gaza without power, food, or fuel, causing a humanitarian catastrophe. After 15 months of bombings, displacement, and disease outbreaks, aid efforts remained restricted by mandatory pre-clearance requirements from Israeli authorities, or else rejection, of so-called dual-use items.

“Like all humanitarian organisations, MSF is forced to adapt to conditions imposed by Israeli authorities as part of a system designed to maintain the blockade of Gaza,” says Laaroussi. “Although more trucks have entered during the ceasefire, the Israel authorities’ goods entry system, systematically used to obstruct humanitarian aid, has made it impossible for us to scale-up properly, even before this blockade.”

This system, which is conducted with no transparency, systematically obstructs and restricts the entry of lifesaving supplies including scalpels, scissors, oxygen concentrators, desalination units, and generators. Even when approved, the process takes a long time and continues to be a complex bureaucratic impediment.