

## PRESS RELEASE

## Gaza's children face Covid-19 spike amid power shutdown and ongoing airstrikes

Ramallah, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2020 – The Israeli government has blocked the entry of fuel necessary for the operation of Gaza's only power plant, threatening essential services such as hospitals, water treatment, and sewage management systems as the enclave faces new lockdown measures following a spike in COVID-19 cases.

The Ministry of Health in Gaza [announced four new cases](#) of COVID-19 in a densely populated refugee camp on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> August. These cases are the first that have occurred outside of quarantine centres, raising fears of a dramatic increase in cases among the overcrowded population of two million packed into the 25 mile-long Gaza strip, which is completely cut off by the blockade. The de-facto authorities in Gaza have declared a state of emergency and imposed a 48-hour lockdown.

Save the Children is warning that the power outages will woefully undermine urgent efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 and place the lives of an already vulnerable population at immediate risk as hospitals and water sanitation systems struggle to remain operational. Hospitals are running dangerously low on their emergency fuel reserves, and will now be faced with redeploying the little resource they have to stem the threat of COVID-19 - leaving them little choice but to postpone surgeries, discharge patients prematurely, and halt life-saving treatments like dialysis entirely. The [Ministry of Health in Gaza has warned](#) that the lives of babies in incubators and neonatal care units are at immediate risk.

Other essential infrastructure such as water treatment and sewage facilities will cease to function without fuel, reducing access to clean water and making it difficult for families to wash their hands – a crucial step in halting the spread of coronavirus. This, and limited medical capacity, threaten to create the perfect conditions for COVID-19 to spread like wildfire. Summer temperatures are also consistently rising well over 30 degrees with no electricity supply for families to use fans or air conditioning.

Ten-year-old Majd\* said: “*In Gaza we have the electricity crisis, and now we have to lockdown because of the coronavirus. It is going to be extremely hard to live in isolation inside the house when there is no electricity. This is very bad. I can't go play with my friends and I can't even watch TV to pass the time.*”

The sole power plant is now completely out of fuel, leaving<sup>1</sup> families relying on unpredictable remaining sources of reserve fuel, limited to just three hours of electricity a day. This comes after weeks of heightened tensions with incendiary balloons and rockets fired from Gaza followed by air-strikes and artillery fire from the Israeli military. A 3-year old girl and an 11-year old boy were reportedly injured by the airstrikes on 15th August.<sup>2</sup>

Save the Children's Director for Advocacy and Communications in the Middle East, Mohamad Alasmar said: “*Gaza has already been battling the spread of COVID-19, and now with each day that fuel supply is denied, a humanitarian catastrophe looms closer. How can anywhere be expected to cope with a pandemic with no fuel to run its hospitals, ambulances or services that provide clean water - let alone somewhere like Gaza where families were already struggling to get treatment for their children and facing ongoing airstrikes.*

<sup>1</sup> Gaza's sole power plant shut down on Tuesday morning (18/08) after the plant's fuel reservoir ran out.

<sup>2</sup> See Alalam TV, <https://rb.gy/el3bnz>



*"We are calling on armed groups in Gaza to stop sending incendiary balloons and launching rockets and calling on Israel to urgently renew fuel supply to allow Gaza to respond to the growing threat of COVID-19. The blockade is illegal under international law and the decision to block fuel to the population amounts to unlawful collective punishment. Israel remains the occupying power of Gaza and, as the primary duty bearer, retains responsibilities for the welfare of the population. It must lift the land, air and sea blockade of Gaza in line with its obligations under international law.", continued Alasmar.*

Both Palestinian and Israeli children continue to suffer the most from the evolving crisis and violence. Only when the blockade on Gaza is lifted can the humanitarian crisis be reversed, paving the way to a long-term peace for all children in the region.

*\*Name changed for protection*

**Bei Fragen oder Interviewwünschen wenden Sie sich bitte an unsere Pressestelle.**

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**Über Save the Children**

Im Nachkriegsjahr 1919 gründete die britische Sozialreformerin und Kinderrechtlerin Eglantyne Jebb Save the Children, um Kinder in Deutschland und Österreich vor dem Hungertod zu retten. Heute ist die inzwischen größte unabhängige Kinderrechtsorganisation der Welt in über 120 Ländern im Einsatz. Save the Children ist da für Kinder in Kriegen, Konflikten und Katastrophen – seit 100 Jahren und darüber hinaus. Diese Kinder zu schützen, zu stärken und zu fördern ist das zentrale Anliegen der Organisation. Die Schwerpunkte der Arbeit liegen in den Bereichen Schule und Bildung, Schutz vor Ausbeutung und Gewalt sowie Überleben und Gesundheit. Save the Children setzt sich ein für eine Welt, die die Rechte der Kinder achtet. Eine Welt, in der alle Kinder gesund und sicher leben und frei und selbstbestimmt aufwachsen können.