# Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman regarding the humanitarian situation in Gaza

# <http://www.unicef.com.au/More/MediaCentre/Mediareleases/StatementbyAnnMVenemanGaza/tabid/246/Default.aspx>

**JOHANNESBURG, 14 January 2009**- Over 300 children have been killed and more than 1,500 wounded, since the beginning of the Gaza crisis on 27 December, 2008 as at 13 Jan 09. Each day more children are being hurt, their small bodies wounded, their young lives shattered.

These are not just cold figures. They talk of children’s lives interrupted. No human being can watch this without being moved. No parent can witness this and not see their own child.

This is tragic. This is unacceptable.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon is currently in the Middle-East appealing for urgent compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1860, which calls for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire and for the unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian access to all, especially to the most vulnerable, must be unhampered.

The Resolution also stresses that civilian populations must be protected on both sides, in line with international principles.

Schools and medical facilities must be protected and be considered zones of peace, in all circumstances.

The crisis in Gaza is singular in that children and their families have nowhere to escape, no refuge. The very thought of being trapped in a closed area is disturbing for adults in peace times. What then goes through the mind of a child who is trapped in such relentless violence?

Children form the majority of the population of Gaza. They are bearing the brunt of a conflict which is not theirs. As fighting reaches the heart of heavily populated urban areas, the impact of lethal weapons will carry an even heavier toll on children. Absolute priority must be given to their protection.

Together with its partners, UNICEF is doing all it can to assist them, despite the difficult current conditions. New resources have been made immediately available to provide children and their families with their urgent needs: water, educational and resuscitation kits, among many other assistance items.

Beyond the immediate needs of the children who have lost their homes, have no access to water, electricity and medicine, beyond the horrific physical scars and injuries however, are the deeper psychological wounds of these children. For these children, psychological and social healing will be long and difficult.

Only when there is a cessation of hostilities can children begin the long journey back to a semblance of what is the most fundamental right of a child, the right to a life free from physical and mental violence.

UNICEF calls on all parties to take every measure to protect children.