

## On the Occasion of World Mental Health Day

October 10, 2007

### Israeli Siege Strangles the Palestinian Civilians in the Gaza Strip and Leads to Unprecedented Mental Health Problems

The international community celebrates today the annual occasion of World Mental Health Day which is considered a day for raising awareness and knowledge of this significant aspect of life. The mental health has high importance in people's enjoyment of physical health, happiness, playing social and humanitarian role properly in family, community, and world.

This occasion comes while the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza Strip, are living under severe political and economic conditions. The Israeli occupation practices escalate day by day. They include: killing, demolishing homes, razing agricultural lands, tightening checkpoints as well as imposing total siege and closure on the movement of people and goods to and from Gaza Strip.

In an unprecedented action, Israel has deprived all Palestinian citizens in Gaza Strip of movement, including patients (except a very few number of critical cases), students, businessmen, and families. Israel has thereby transformed almost 1.5 million civilians into prisoners until further notice. The prevention of the movement of goods and basic raw materials has led to paralysis in all aspects of life, and the near collapse of the Palestinian economy, as well as a serious rise in the poverty rate to 87%, and unemployment rate to 70%. Also, in another example of escalating repression, Israel has declared the Gaza Strip to be an 'enemy entity,' and has threatened to cut off the provision of electricity, water, and fuels to Gaza Strip.

The Gaza Community Mental Health Programme considers this decision illegal and immoral and believes it is in contradiction with principles of international law and human rights as well as with Israel's responsibilities as an occupying state. GCMHP also views this declaration as a dangerous intensification of the policy of strangulation it has inflicted on Palestinian civilians and as a form of collective punishment that will harm and increase the suffering of more than 1.5 million civilians -- children, women, elderly, and unemployed workers.

Such practices have serious mental consequences for the Palestinian people, a majority of whose civilians are suffering from feelings of anger, anxiety, panic, depression, frustration, and hopelessness as a result of Israeli occupation practices, siege, and poverty.

GCMHP warns that these conditions will lead to a severe and dangerous deterioration in the mental health among the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip in particular and in Palestine in general.

We, at Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, call on the international community and human rights organizations to immediately intervene in order to pressure Israel to stop implementing its plan of strangling the Gaza Strip. Such an action will aggregate the Palestinian humanitarian sufferings and will lead to an even greater political and security deterioration in the region and the world.

Finally, GCMHP would like to extend its greetings to colleagues who work in the field of mental health, both in Palestine and worldwide, for their efforts and roles in improving and

developing the mental health for human beings everywhere. Further, on this occasion, GCMHP calls on them to exert their utmost efforts to support the rights of the Palestinian people in order to enjoy human dignity, and to end all forms of violence that target the Palestinian people, the first of which is ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land, as well as granting the Palestinians their rights to self-determination. This will contribute to the enhancement of the mental health of the Palestinian people and will bear fruitful results with regard to peace and development in the region and the entire world.

Gaza Community Mental Health Programme