



1 August 2014. Tears can certainly speak more eloquently than words. That is at least the experience of Chris Gunness, the spokesman of UNRWA, the UN agency in charge of Palestinian refugees in Gaza.

Gunness presents himself on Twitter as a "passionate advocate for Palestine refugees to enjoy all their rights to the full, including the right to a just and durable solution". However, he may sometimes have felt that his voice was not always heard as loud as he would like.



All that changed a couple of days ago when his emotions broke through when he thought an interview with Al Jazeera was over. In fact, the cameras were not turned off and his tears over the plight of the children of Gaza were recorded and shared on the internet by thousands of

users around the globe.

Gunness is reluctant to talk about the incident that perhaps made him more famous than he would like: „My tears pale into insignificance compared with those of the people of Gaza,“ he says in an interview with UNRIC and quickly focuses on the situation at hand, and the fact that the capacity of UNRWA to help the civilians of Gaza is reaching a breaking point.

"I don't want to focus this on us, but eight of our staff have been killed, how many aid organisations would tolerate a situation where so many of their staff were killed and yet not withdraw? Because of the huge humanitarian imperative UNRWA remains there. We all continue what we were doing."

There is certainly a strong case for tears over the fate of Gaza: According to the United Nations, nearly four weeks of conflict have left more than 1,300 Palestinians dead and 6,000 injured. Israel has faced rocket fire, and hostilities have resulted in the deaths of 3 civilians and 56 soldiers, with dozens injured.



--Faced by the tragedy of the people of Gaza, many ask us : "What can we do?"

"For individuals I would say obviously, give money to a philanthropical organisation that you trust and you feel is doing a good job and needs your money. I would say to individuals as well: Be informed. Ignorance is a very dangerous thing in the Middle-East. So be informed of the latest news and - if I am allowed- I will give my Twitter a plug – [@ChrisGunness on Twitter](#) , because I am giving out minute by minute and hour by hour news.

Tell people about it, spread the news that there is a UN organisation out there that desperately needs moral and political support, and also financial and advocacy support.

And to governments, of course, I say: give generously to our emergency appeal because we have a huge task ahead of us when the guns fall silent and we can continue our emergency work, because someone has to move these hundreds of thousands of people out of these shelters and we have to begin a recovery and reconstruction phase, which is going to be

immense.

We are not there yet, and we don't know exactly how that is going to work, but we certainly encourage governments and institutional donors to be generous with our emergency appeal, „flash appeal“ as we call it, because we are going to need a lot of support.“

-The current conflict happened at a time when many stake holders had warned that Gaza faced an uncertain and unsustainable future because of overcrowding and lack of resources. Lack of drinking water was already a main concern.

"Already before the conflict, 95% of the water in Gaza was undrinkable. This means that we have to truck in every liter of fresh water that is consumed in the 86 shelters we run in Gaza, in addition to food and mattresses. Sanitation is a big problem...these schools are made for school children coming in the morning and leaving in the afternoon and some of them are now home -25/7 - to, some to 3 and a half thousand of people. You can imagine how desperate the situation is. Things are intolerable, things are terrible and if the news that the cease-fire has broken down are true, I fear that things are going to get considerably worse, and that is very worrying.“



At 19.00 Central European Time on 1 August, a 72 hour truce seemed to have collapsed after a fight broke out, in which 2 Israeli soldiers and 53 Palestinians were killed. The Spokesperson of the UN Secretary-General said in a statement that "this breach of the ceasefire is now leading to a renewed escalation. The Secretary-General urges both sides to show maximum restraint and return to the agreed 72-hour humanitarian ceasefire that tragically lasted such a brief period of time. He also urges those with influence over the parties to do everything to convince them to observe the humanitarian ceasefire."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

If you want to contribute see ["How you can help".](#)

For updates see the newest [Gaza Situation report](#) from UNRWA.□

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (**UNRWA**) is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA's services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

Financial support to UNRWA has not kept pace with an increased demand for services caused by growing numbers of registered refugees, expanding need, and deepening poverty. As a result, the Agency's General Fund (GF), supporting UNRWA's core activities and 97 per cent reliant on voluntary contributions, has begun each year with a large projected deficit. Currently the deficit stands at US\$ 68 million.

(www.unrwa.org)