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### Australian Government on Palestinian relief

## Providing a Voice

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release 20 October 2006

The Australian Government has said that Australians who wish to provide relief for Palestinians suffering severe deprivation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), should send their donations to non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

*Australians for Palestine* has ascertained from the Australian Government that the best way to assist people wanting to rebuild their lives and homes in the West Bank and Gaza is to make cash donations to Australian NGOs already working in those countries.

Nasser Mashni, a spokesperson for *Australians for Palestine* said that "since Israel reoccupied Gaza on 16 June 2006, 80% of Gazan households live in so-called 'deep poverty', that is, on less than \$3.50 per day and Palestinians are barely able to sustain themselves. These people would literally starve if they did not receive food from the United Nations."

According to Mr Mashni, the situation in Gaza is a humanitarian disaster, and in the West Bank, conditions are deteriorating rapidly. "In fact," said Mr Mashni, "the situation is so extreme now that even if Israel's restrictions on movement and access are lifted, full aid support resumes and Israel transfers the almost half a billion dollars in customs revenue it is withholding from the Palestinians, the dramatic decline in economic standards will severely affect Palestinian society for a long time to come."

"Unemployment is now at the unprecedented level of 40% compared to less than 12% in 1999. Added to this, 165,000 government workers have received no pay for more than eight months. And all the while, Israel continues to tighten its control so that nothing goes in or out of Gaza. It is no wonder that the United Nations has to feed approximately 830,000 of Gaza's 1.4 million population," said Mr Mashni.

While Australia will give \$16.2 million in 2006-07 through AusAid, most of that will go to assist multilateral agencies support the peace process and provide some basic services. "It won't feed the people nor rebuild their lives," said Mr Mashni "and although the Palestinians are fiercely proud and independent, they have been so reduced to poverty that they have no choice but to accept help to survive."

Mr Mashni said that many Australians want to help, but they do not know where they should send their donations. A list of NGOs currently running appeals for the occupied Palestinian Territories is available on the *Australian Council for International Development* website at: <http://members.acfid.asn.au/>

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