

**Andrew Whitley**, currently Director of the Representative Office of UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, located in New York was our first presenter. Joining UNRWA in July 2002 as its Director of External Relations, he was responsible for donor relations and resource mobilization, at its Gaza Headquarters. In the course of his career with the UN, he has also served with UNCTAD in Geneva, as Chief of the Secretary-General's Office, and with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, holding senior posts in UN transitional administrations in East Timor and Kosovo.

Mr. Whitley, reiterated the understated HORROR of the recent horrific aftermath of the bombing. The inability to get food and aid into the area due to the blockade has been beyond imagination. Human Beings cannot be denied the right to live decently and comfortably with sustenance. The fact that tunnels were made to get some supplies and goods, does not give Israel license to bomb them. It seems apparent that Israel took time during the lull to prepare militarily. He explained that each humanitarian crisis always occurs in a specific political context and the political dynamics around the present crisis in Gaza are particularly complex, including, for example, security in Israel, the role of Hamas in Palestinian politics, the upcoming elections in Israel, the fact that the Israeli offensive began in the closing weeks of the Bush Administration, implications for Al Qaeda , concerns in the broader Middle East, the relevance of U.N. Security Council resolutions, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Looking at the implications of the present crisis in Gaza for humanitarian actors generally, Gaza today raises many of the dilemmas faced by humanitarians in other difficult situations: questions of access to those in need, questions of the security of humanitarian personnel, questions about the relationship of humanitarian action with international humanitarian law.

The latest conflict in Gaza has exacerbated an already fragile humanitarian situation and created another humanitarian crisis in the Middle East.

Even before Israeli airstrikes began, humanitarian agencies faced restrictions on personnel and shortages of vital supplies. The current round of fighting has left almost 1400 people dead, thousands wounded and many more with limited access to food, water and health care. Though limited humanitarian aid has been allowed into the territory, humanitarian aid alone cannot be the answer to the problem. As with all conflicts, the answer lies in a political settlement. The United Nations Security Council should establish a commission of

inquiry to investigate alleged laws-of-war violations in Gaza "There must be a serious and independent investigation into the shocking loss of civilian life that took place near the UN. The January 6 attack, which is reported to have killed between 30 and 40 people, illustrates the need for a wide-ranging independent investigation. The United Nations in Gaza said the school was clearly marked as a UN building and that it had provided GPS coordinates for the site to Israeli forces.

The consistent failure of both Israel and Hamas to investigate past allegations of laws-of-war violations by their forces underscores the need for an international investigation into this incident as well as other alleged laws-of-war violations by both parties to this conflict, Human Rights Watch said. The UN commission of inquiry should make its findings public, and offer recommendations for holding accountable all persons found responsible for serious laws-of-war violations.

We have been unable to conduct full independent research on this and other incidents at this time due to ongoing hostilities, and because Israel has severely restricted access to Gaza for all international media and human rights monitors since early November, and blocked access entirely since the fighting began on December 27. Due to the blockade, wheat, food, first aid and supplies cannot be delivered to assist the suffering.

According to officials from the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and eyewitnesses who spoke to the media and Human Rights Watch, at around 3:45 p.m. on January 6, at least three Israeli tank shells struck around the perimeter of the UN's al-Fakhora school, where hundreds were sheltered from the fighting in the crowded Jabaliya refugee camp. Other accounts have referred to an Israeli mortar or artillery attack.