Press conference, Thursday 22nd June 2006, Geneva

Donors' responsibilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Oral remarks of Paul Hunt, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to the highest attainable standard of health ('the right to health'), supplementing his press release of 22nd June.

Under my mandate, I am asked to report on the realisation of the right to health throughout the world, including international obstacles to its implementation.

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, several different actors have extremely important responsibilities for implementation of the right to health – among them Israel and the Palestinian Authority. But today I am not commenting on the duties of Israel and the PA. My focus today is solely on the responsibilities of the donor community in relation to health in the OPT.

I am especially concerned by the response of the donor community to the Palestinian Legislative Council elections won by Hamas in January this year.

Prior to the elections, donors provided almost 50% of the budget for the Palestinian Ministry of Health. Since the elections, most donors have suspended their financial contributions to the Health Ministry.

In practice, this means that donors have imposed sanctions on the Ministry of Health. These are not a form of economic sanctions that the world is familiar with. They are humanitarian sanctions: the withdrawal of humanitarian assistance from the sick, infirm and elderly living under a prolonged occupation.

Such humanitarian sanctions are unprecedented.

In June 2003, 17 donor Governments endorsed 23 Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship. A few weeks ago, these Principles were endorsed by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD as the standard for its Members' humanitarian work.

In relation to the OPT, donors have failed to respect these Principles.

They have not kept their humanitarian action separate from political objectives, as required by the Principles. Neither have they based their humanitarian action "solely on the basis of need". Nor have they respected "the implementation of international … human rights", such as the right to the highest attainable standard of health.

In short, the donors have failed in their humanitarian responsibilities, jeopardising the right to the highest attainable standard of health in the OPT.

Because of the weakness of international mechanisms of accountability, I urge national legislatures and civil society to hold donor Governments to account for their humanitarian policies in the OPT.

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