

**Statement WHO/18
23 November 2007**

WHO EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER DETERIORATION OF THE HEALTH SITUATION IN THE GAZA STRIP

The health situation in the Gaza Strip, which has been under checkpoint crossing restrictions since June 2007, continues to decline and risks becoming a humanitarian crisis.

The World Health Organization (WHO) notes with grave concern reports that patients trying to leave Gaza for specialist medical care in Israel or neighbouring countries are increasingly being denied travel permits.

Reports indicate that of the 4074 patients in Gaza who have applied for travel permits on medical grounds since June 2007, 713 have had their applications denied. The proportion of patients who have been denied passage has reportedly more than doubled since the restrictions were imposed, increasing from 10.7% in June to 22.9% in October.

Reports reaching WHO also indicate that 12 people have died in the Gaza Strip since October 2007. They were either delayed at checkpoints or there were delays in granting them permits.

The health system of the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in Gaza, is heavily dependent on referral to hospitals and other health services outside the area. The recent closure of the Rafah crossing and restrictions imposed on the Erez crossing are impeding the movement not only of people but also of essential medical equipment and supplies into Gaza, home to around 1.3 million people. Equipment in many hospitals and laboratories no longer functions and the travel restrictions mean in many cases that replacement parts do not arrive, consumables and supplies are not replenished, which weakens the health system further. As health services continue to decline, the need for referral to services outside the area, such as in East Jerusalem, Jordan, Egypt and Israel, grows and patients left behind become increasingly vulnerable to medical complications.

WHO would like to remind all that international conventions do not permit the withholding of appropriate medical and health care. WHO urges all to abide by humanitarian principles and international conventions regardless of political considerations and military conflicts. Diseases and epidemics recognize no borders or barriers and access to appropriate medical care is the responsibility of all sides.

All press releases, fact sheets and other WHO media material may be found at: www.who.int.