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"Self Help – Self Heal" – the European Union renews its support to improve mental health services in Gaza

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip will be able to access mental health services more easily in the coming years thanks to renewed support from the European Union. A new grant of nearly €600,000 designed to improve the training of medical staff and promote the well-being of local communities is being launched involving the International Medical Corps and four Palestinian organisations¹.

Research has shown that living conditions in Gaza - such as restricted movement, reduced access to education and health care, poverty and unemployment - can create stress and feelings of isolation and ultimately impact on the level of mental disorders within the population there. According to the UN, psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder in the Gaza Strip has dramatically risen following the escalation of violence last November. The recently-launched 'Self Help – Self Heal' programme has been specifically designed to target populations living under prolonged conflict conditions and will empower people in Gaza to take care of their own individual and family mental health needs.

"The EU has been working with Palestinian civil society for many years to guarantee appropriate mental health care for those in need in the Gaza Strip as well as in other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory. Thanks to this new grant we will be able to promote more effective methods to deal with severe emotional and mental distress within the population in Gaza", said the EU Representative Mr. John Gatt-Rutter. *"Of course our work in this important area must go hand in hand with efforts by all partners to restore normal socioeconomic and living conditions in the Gaza Strip"* he added.

Children, adolescents, elderly people and those with pre-existing mental health issues are particularly at risk of severe psychological distress during crises. Families rarely know how to identify and respond to these symptoms. By training parents and caregivers and setting up peer support groups, the EU and International Medical Corps will help families to manage the mental health consequences of life in the Gaza Strip. The impact of the programme will be multiplied by training Palestinian health care and rehabilitation staff and other professionals in Gaza to deliver this level of support and training to families affected by mental health issues. The programme will reach more than 2,300 people through community centres in the Gaza Strip and more than 230 health professionals will receive training.

Background:

Establishing stronger community support networks for people in need of mental healthcare services in Gaza is in line with the 2010-15 'Plan of Organisation of Mental Health Services in the occupied Palestinian territory' and with global WHO policy guidelines. Since 2010, the EU has invested almost € 4 million to work in partnership with the PA Ministry of Health as well as WHO and Palestinian NGOs to improve mental health in the oPt. Moreover, in the Gaza Strip, the EU supports UNRWA in providing health services to Palestine refugees and provides psychosocial support mainly to children through its humanitarian assistance office (ECHO).

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¹ Gaza Community Mental Health Program (GCMHP), Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS), Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR)