

Israel 'stalling Gaza rebuilding'

By Paul Wood
BBC News, Jerusalem

Vital reconstruction in Gaza is being stalled because Israel is not allowing in enough supplies, UN Middle East special envoy Robert Serry has warned.

Mr Serry praised Israel for opening crossings into the coastal territory after a ceasefire was declared in June. However, he said it was still difficult to import items like cement or piping.

Among the projects the UN is waiting to restart are a new housing scheme for the homeless and a project to stop sewage being pumped onto Gazan beaches.

Kick start

Gaza is much calmer and quieter since the ceasefire, but life there is still very hard. Some 650,000 people - about half the population - depend on the UN for their daily meal. That is why the UN wants to use the calm, or "tahdia" as it is called in Arabic, to kick-start the local economy.

The UN has its own big reconstruction projects - a new sewerage system for Gaza and 1,200 new dwellings for homeless people. However, many of the UN's projects stand idle because materials are still very slow coming in across the border with Israel.

'Normal life'

Mr Serry said the UN was monitoring the situation, and that there was more going on inside Gaza.

"There is more fuel coming now inside", he explained. "But we do need more to actually start to work for that more positive strategy for Gaza."

"The tahdia is an opportunity for it, and as the UN - being the lifeline here for the Gazans as you know - being mostly involved also in the humanitarian operations here, we consider this very important," he added.

"This is the only way in which you can give Gazans back some normal life again." The quantities of cement, gravel and steel for reconstruction allowed by Israel across the border are increasing.

Mr Serry said that a strong economy in Gaza would only help the cause of peace, and that the opportunity afforded by the ceasefire should not be wasted.