

The Swedish government and financier Roger Akelius have jointly donated 1.2 billion kronor to UNICEF's efforts in Gaza. The goal is to give hundreds of thousands of children, who have been out of school for over two years, a path back to education and security.

“The donations will make a huge difference,” says Jonathan Veitch, UNICEF’s top official in Gaza.

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Text



Financier Roger Akelius, together with the Swedish state, has donated 1.2 billion kronor to UNICEF's efforts in Gaza. Photo: Cornelia Jönsson

Last week, the Swedish government announced that it would donate 400 million kronor to UNICEF's work in Gaza. Shortly afterwards, financier Roger Akelius **doubled** the amount through his Akelius Foundation, which donated 800 million kronor to the same cause.



“The money will mainly go towards opening temporary learning centres. We are trying to get the children back into learning, give them safe environments and an opportunity to restore some form of normality to their lives,” says Jonathan Veitch, UNICEF’s top executive in Gaza.

He adds that the donation from the Akelius Foundation gives Unicef the opportunity to do more than the organization previously planned, and an opportunity to work more long-term.



UNICEF's head in Gaza Jonathan Veitch, with the Abdelrahman family, in southern Gaza. Photo: UNICEF (Press photo)

“We are going to get the children back into formal education and even rebuild some of the schools. The donation is for more than five years, which gives us the opportunity to think long-term. It has been extremely difficult for us the last two years because we have just dealt with crisis after crisis. So we are very grateful for that,” says Jonathan Veitch.

The need is great – around 700,000 children have been out of school for two and a half years. Today, around 180,000 children have access to UNICEF’s temporary learning centres, but around 200,000 are still missing out on education.

"So those are the ones we are going to target now with the Swedish money. Right now the children are going in shifts to the temporary learning centers and are only receiving instruction in core subjects. The plan is to get all the children into instruction according to the curriculum from September," he says.



Unicef's Jonathan Veitch with the Alaa family, in southern Gaza. Photo: Unicef (Press photo)

In addition to getting children back into education, a large part of UNICEF's work in Gaza consists of helping families access essential supplies such as food, water and winter clothing, which the organization provided to 300,000 children during the winter.



“Among other things, we deliver water and sanitation services to most of Gaza. Because the systems are broken, we often have to truck water in, which is very expensive. We also need pumps and equipment that we are not always allowed to bring in. So even for very basic problems, there are a lot of challenges,” says Jonathan Veitch.

UNICEF's efforts focus primarily on the most vulnerable children and their families. According to Jonathan Veitch, 50,000 children have lost at least one parent during the war.

He tells of a family he met earlier in the day, where two boys, nine and eleven years old, are suffering from injuries from a grenade attack.

“One boy is blind in one eye since an attack last September and his brother lost both legs, so he is stuck at home. He is scared and ashamed of it and does not want to leave home. Now we have given him a wheelchair, and the family the necessary supplies. It is a long process and will take years before he can fully recover and hopefully have a very productive life, just as he and every child deserve,” he says.



One of UNICEF's temporary learning centers in Gaza. Photo: Jonathan Crickx (Press photo)

Unlike other organizations, such as the UN agency Unrwa, which is linked to the terrorist organization Hamas, Jonathan Veitch emphasizes that Unicef has a robust control system to ensure that the money is used properly.

"They let us be because they know we are here to help people. Then we have one of the world's most robust monitoring systems for humanitarian aid where we review everything at several levels, and check with the families that they have received the goods and money they were supposed to," he says.