



DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

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on action by the United Nations system and
intergovernmental organizations
relevant to the question of Palestine

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. UN Secretary-General urges member states to make UNRWA funds “sustainable”	1
II. UN Special Coordinator issues statement on the growing tensions in Gaza	2
III. UN Special Coordinator issues statement on the electricity crisis in Gaza	3
IV. UN Special Coordinator briefs Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question	3
V. OPT Humanitarian Fund releases emergency funding for fuel for hospitals in the Gaza Strip	5

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I. UN SECRETARY GENERAL URGES MEMBER STATES TO MAKE UNRWA FUNDS “SUSTAINABLE”

On 7 April 2017, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres presented his [report](#) to the General Assembly entitled “Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.” The following is the [press release](#) announcing the release of the report:

In a landmark report presented today, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, urges all member states actively to support and make the funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) “sustainable, predictable and sufficient”.

Mr. Guterres underscores that member states “widely value the indispensable role” UNRWA plays in the provision of essential services to the Palestine Refugees and the “impact it has had in the context of the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict”. The Secretary-General further notes the deep recognition among UN members of UNRWA’s contribution to preserving the rights and dignity of Palestine Refugees. His report says “the agency was described by member states as “unique” and “special”, and its contribution to political stability in a region experiencing significant volatility was highlighted by a broad cross section of member states.” UNRWA’s role in the “mitigation of extremism, its stabilizing influence and its contribution to peace and security” is also highlighted.

At a time when the Middle East region is plagued by widespread conflict, violence and radicalization, the value of UNRWA’s services to Palestine Refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and a widely shared concern about repeated shortfalls and lasting financial insecurity for the Agency, served as a trigger for consultations which led to the report. These were carried out by Switzerland and Turkey on behalf of the Secretary-General, in New York, Geneva and beyond in recent months.

The Secretary-General notes in his report that recurring financial crises “threaten to disrupt service provision to as many as 5.3 million Palestine refugees, intensifying the deep uncertainty this already vulnerable population is exposed to.”

In the summer of 2015, UNRWA came within days of being forced to delay the opening of its 700 schools for 500,000 Palestine Refugee boys and girls because of a major funding gap, sending shockwaves through the community that considers education as the critical basis for the preservation of hope and opportunity for its children. Palestine Refugees, host governments, UNRWA partners and donors agreed that such a crisis should never be allowed to happen again.

The central message of the Secretary-General’s report is that a combination of initiatives is required to stabilize UNRWA’s financial situation and that this must be “vigorously pursued” by all UN member states. These should include strengthened and predictable voluntary funding from a broader base of donors; setting up and accessing the instruments of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank, as well as continued and possibly increased contributions from the UN’s regular budget. In committing his leadership to concrete and prompt action, the Secretary-General notes that he will work with UN members “to ensure that Palestine refugees are not left behind in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.”

UNRWA's Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl, welcomed the unprecedented nature of the initiative: "I wish to thank wholeheartedly the Secretary-General for his leadership and support. I am very encouraged by the recommendations and new avenues presented in his report. I am deeply grateful to Switzerland and Turkey for their remarkable energy and engagement in carrying out the consultations and I welcome the strong solidarity and valuable contributions by member states and international financial institutions." Mr. Krähenbühl noted that "the importance of the report lies both in its renewed focus on the plight of Palestine refugees and in the

determination to improve the resourcing of UNRWA's vital services."

He underlined that "while nothing is more important today than a just and durable political solution to the plight of Palestine Refugees, it is imperative in the meantime that UNRWA be in position to live up to its mandate and ensure the provision of its key services in education, health care, relief and social services, camp improvement, microfinance and protection, as well as its emergency response. This," he said, "is an investment in the human capital of the region and in the preservation of the rights, dignity and hope of Palestine Refugees."

II. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR ISSUES STATEMENT ON THE GROWING TENSIONS IN GAZA

On 8 April 2017, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nikolay Mladenov, issued the following [statement](#) on the growing tensions in Gaza:

I am deeply concerned by the growing tensions in Gaza. Over the past decade, Palestinians in Gaza have lived through four conflicts, with no freedom, unprecedented Israeli restrictions, a dire humanitarian crisis, high unemployment, an ongoing electricity crisis and the lack of political perspective.

While the Palestinian Government needs to ensure its fiscal sustainability under increasingly difficult economic conditions, it is important that reforms or decisions to reduce expenditures are fairly distributed and made with consideration to the harsh conditions under which people in Gaza live.

I urge the responsible parties to work together to find a solution to the current crisis and call on all factions to allow the Palestinian Government to assume its responsibility in Gaza.

Gaza is an integral part of the future Palestinian state and no efforts should be spared to bring about real national reconciliation that ends the division. Leaders have a responsibility to avoid escalation and bridge the growing divide between Gaza and the West Bank that further fragments the Palestinian people.

III. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR ISSUES STATEMENT ON THE ELECTRICITY CRISIS IN GAZA

On 19 April 2017, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, issued the following [statement](#) on the electricity crisis in Gaza:

I am following with great concern the tense situation in Gaza, where a new energy crisis is now unfolding.

Reform of the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO) is essential to improve revenue collection and transparency in line with international standards. The defacto authorities in Gaza must ensure that collection rates are improved and that revenue collected in Gaza is returned to the legitimate Palestinian authorities in order to keep fuel and electricity supply flowing. All in Gaza must share the burden by paying their bills. It is the poorest Palestinians in Gaza who pay the price for exceptions and privileges that others enjoy.

This reform, as well as the necessary investments in reducing electricity losses and upgrading the grid in Gaza, should be financed and supported by the international community but it cannot do it alone. It must go hand-in-hand with the Palestinian Government facilitating the

purchase of fuel for the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) under conditions that temporarily alleviate or substantially reduce relevant fuel taxes.

Israel also has a significant responsibility to assist by facilitating the entry of materials for repairs and maintenance of the grid and power plant. Egyptian power lines to Gaza also need to be repaired and upgraded.

The social, economic and political consequences of this impending energy crisis should not be underestimated. Palestinians in Gaza, who live in a protracted humanitarian crisis, can no longer be held hostage by disagreements, divisions and closures.

I call on all parties, including the international community, to come together and ensure this vital issue of energy for Gaza is resolved once and for all. The United Nations stands ready to provide its support in achieving this vital goal.

IV. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION

On 20 April 2017, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, briefed the Security Council on “the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. The following are excerpts from his briefing ([S/PV.7929](#)):

...

Developments in the Arab-Israeli conflict continue to resonate across the region. The question of Palestine remains a potent symbol and rallying cry that is easily misappropriated and exploited by extremist groups. Ending the occupation and realizing a two-State solution will not solve all the region’s problems, but as long

as the conflict persists it will continue to feed them.

Sporadic violence has continued in recent weeks, as five Palestinians and one Israeli were killed in various acts of violence. Among the fatalities were two Palestinian teenaged boys, shot by Israeli security forces outside Ramallah, as well as a British woman who was murdered by a Palestinian man in Jerusalem.

In March, Israel approved the establishment of a new settlement and declared some 240 acres as State land inside the occupied Palestinian territory. These moves further undermine the territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian State in the West Bank. Tenders for close to 2,000 housing units, the vast majority in major population centres close to the 1967 lines, were also issued. I take note of recent reports that Israel has adopted a policy of restraint by which construction will be advanced “almost exclusively” in the built-up areas of settlements, but it is too early to determine how this policy will manifest itself on the ground. Settlement construction is illegal under international law and I urge all such activities to cease.

On the Palestinian side, multiple worrying developments are further cementing the Gaza-West Bank divide and dangerously increasing the risk of escalation. In April, the Palestinian Government reduced payments to thousands of Palestinian Authority employees in the Gaza Strip. It is important that the burden of decisions to reduce expenditures be fairly distributed and made with due consideration to the harsh conditions under which people in Gaza live.

Four months ago, Palestinians in Gaza went to the streets when people were left with only a few hours of electricity per day. The situation was temporarily resolved with the help of Qatar; however, a more serious crisis is now unfolding again as electricity is down to less than six hours per day. The social, economic and political consequences of these developments should not be underestimated.

Meanwhile, Hamas continues to tighten its iron grip over Gaza by forming an administrative committee that is seen

by many to be a direct challenge to the legitimate Palestinian Government. Following the assassination of one of its militants, it temporarily put in place a series of restrictions preventing Palestinians and internationals from leaving and banning fishing for two weeks.

On 6 April, three Palestinians were executed by Hamas in gross violation of international law and without a fair trial. These actions were condemned by the Secretary-General, and I am deeply concerned that further extrajudicial executions are anticipated in Gaza. On 7 April, nine people were killed in armed clashes between the newly formed Palestinian joint security forces and members of Islamist militants with links to Al-Qaeda in Lebanon’s Ein El-Hilweh Palestine refugee camp. I note that young Palestinians in refugee camps across the region remain particularly vulnerable to extremists and religious radicals, as living conditions in these communities remain extremely harsh. On 17 April, an estimated 1,500 Palestinian prisoners and detainees began an open-ended hunger strike to protest their conditions in Israeli prisons. I am also concerned by today’s report of an attempt to smuggle explosive material from Gaza into Israel via medical material. Such actions will only exacerbate existing tensions.

...

Efforts to revive engagement between Israelis and Palestinians to achieve a negotiated and sustainable peace must also be intensified. In that regard, I am encouraged by ongoing efforts by Egypt, Jordan and the United States to advance the prospects for peace. On 29 March, the League of Arab States convened in Jordan for their 28th annual summit where, once again, the leaders of 22 countries endorsed the Arab Peace Initiative.

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V. OPT HUMANITARIAN FUND RELEASES EMERGENCY FUNDING FOR FUEL FOR HOSPITALS IN THE GAZA STRIP

On 27 April 2017, the United Nations Coordinator for Humanitarian Assistance and Development Aid in the occupied Palestinian territory, Mr. Robert Piper, issued the following [press release](#):

The UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid and Development Activities, Robert Piper, expressed concern about the deteriorating energy situation in the Gaza Strip and called for swift action from Israeli and Palestinian authorities and members of the international community to protect the provision of critical basic services to Gaza's 1.9 million residents.

With power outages at 20 hours a day and emergency fuel supplies running out, basic services are grinding to a halt," warned Mr. Piper.

According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, fuel to power back-up generators at seven out of 13 hospitals in Gaza is expected to run out within three days. Already, residents of high-rise buildings no longer receive regular water supply, due to lack of power for pumps to reach higher levels, and some 110 million litres of raw or poorly treated sewage is flowing

into the Mediterranean Sea every day due to lack of energy to treat it.

To avoid further deterioration, the oPt Humanitarian Fund, led by the Humanitarian Coordinator, approved today the allocation of US\$ 500,000 for the purchase of emergency fuel to maintain the delivery of essential services at hospitals and other emergency medical facilities.

On 16 April 2017, the Gaza Power Plant (GPP) shut down completely, after exhausting its fuel reserves which increased power outages in Gaza as well as forced additional reliance on back-up generators to power basic services. Malfunctioning of electricity lines coming from Egypt has exacerbated the outages. Gaza's longstanding electricity deficit has been also affected by the restrictions on the import of goods imposed by Israel as part of a land, air and sea blockade, now in its 10th year.