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### UNRWA Commissioner General warns of “unconscionable” levels of poverty among Palestine refugees and appeals to the Arab League for funds

Cairo, 5th September, 2007: The Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, Karen AbuZayd, today warned that if the present situation continues, impoverishment among Palestine refugees in Gaza will soon reach what she called “unconscionable levels”. Addressing the Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States in Cairo, AbuZayd appealed for funds, urging Ministers to honour the Arab League’s previous commitment to provide 7.73 per cent of UNRWA’s budget.

AbuZayd said in her [speech](#) to the Ministerial Council that Palestine refugees are “the poorest and most vulnerable of the Palestinians. In Gaza, Lebanon and elsewhere they cry out for your support. Might this not be an opportunity to show solidarity, through UNRWA?” she asked. “It would alleviate suffering. It would send a strong signal of support in hard times. And it would demonstrate the compassion and generosity of their fellow Arabs towards those who, although they find themselves in dire need, are in the front line of the Arab world’s struggle for recognition of its rights and concerns”.

UNRWA’s emergency programmes, which consist of job creation projects, food and cash support for the most needy are likely to be under funded by about 120 million dollars this year, and regular programmes are likely to be under funded by 107 million dollars.

AbuZayd also told Ministers that because of the chronic funding shortfall, UNRWA was struggling to maintain standards of the services it delivers. She gave Gaza as an example, where examination results have shown that 70 per cent of children do not meet the required standard in mathematics and Arabic.

On the challenges facing the international community, the Commissioner General said that “after fifty-nine year of humanitarian support to Palestine refugees, the need to address Palestinian political aspirations grows more urgent by the day. The fact that statehood remains elusive is a source of immense frustration. It also fuels a sense of dispossession and injustice that echoes throughout the region and is cited as a pretext for extremist militancy,” she said.

AbuZayd also commented on the situation in the Nahr el Bared refugee camp in northern Lebanon which, after months of heavy clashes, was recently taken over by the Lebanese army. She said that 31,000 refugees had been rendered homeless by the fighting and that most had lost their livelihoods. She announced that in concert with the Lebanese government, UNRWA would launch an Emergency Appeal on 10th September to fund assistance to displaced refugees over the next twelve months. And she paid tribute to both Saudi Arabia, which has contributed some 12 million dollars for those displaced from Nahr el Bared and also to His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed, President of the United Arab Emirates, who has pledged 5 million dollars.

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