
UNRWA HONORS FEMALE STAFF ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2016

08 March 2016

**Statement by UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl**

Today on International Women's Day, UNRWA pays a proud tribute to its thousands of female school principals, teachers, education specialists, attendants, doctors, nurses, social workers, administrative and other staff. Every day, in their relentless and courageous work for Palestine Refugees, they are the living illustration of UNRWA's commitment to the advancement of the rights of women and girls. They are examples of the leadership and participation of women inside the Agency and their society. Gender-equality is alive across UNRWA and an integral part of our commitment to the welfare and human development of Palestine refugees. The Agency endeavors to translate this goal into reality through its services.

Half of the 500,000 refugee children receiving an education are girls and few experiences are more uplifting than engaging in dialogue with members of UNRWA school parliaments, be they girls or boys. They advocate for their right to education, improvements in the schools and serve the elderly and disabled through community work. They learn about the importance of their rights, as children, girls and boys, and as Palestinians.

Palestine refugee women have paid a heavy price in the conflicts and instability which have befallen the region in recent years, particularly in Gaza and Syria. Women have taken on extraordinary roles, bearing the brunt of conflict and facing unimaginable losses. In addition to the brutality of conflict, women are also exposed to other forms of pressure and abuse including gender-based violence which takes a profound physical and psychological toll on their lives.

All the while, Palestine refugee women have had to keep their families together including in the appalling conditions prevailing in Syria, where one in three Palestine refugee households are currently headed by women. UNRWA continues to learn how to address more effectively the many challenges facing Palestine refugee women, and in the last five years we have significantly increased our responses by providing counseling, legal aid and other services to thousands of survivors. [Click here](#) to download UNRWA Experience in GBV Programming: Lessons from the First Five Years.

UNRWA today joins the rest of the UN and international community in renewing its commitment to gender equality. The theme for the UN system is "50-50 by 2030: Step it up for Gender Equality" which refers to targets set by the Sustainable Development Goals. Palestine refugee women and girls are right holders and we will ensure that our assistance contributes to the achievement of the SDGs.

On the 8th of March, the struggle for improved rights and recognition of women and girls, as well as for their participation and empowerment, is recognized. But its results should be measured 365 days a year.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA Programme Budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall, projected for 2016 to stand at US\$ 81 million. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals.

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

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