
IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER ANNOUNCES NEW €500,000 CONTRIBUTION DURING GAZA VISIT

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A high-level Irish delegation led by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Charlie Flanagan, visited the Gaza Strip today to witness the destruction caused by last summer's conflict and to see the impact of Irish support for the people of Gaza. During the visit, the Irish delegation saw firsthand the consequences of the 50-day hostilities in the neighbourhood of Shejaya, which was hard hit during the conflict and is yet to be rebuilt. The minister also visited an UNRWA school, to see the impact of Ireland's commitment to supporting quality, basic education for all children, and an UNRWA Collective Centre still sheltering families displaced for now over six months.

While in Gaza, Minister Flanagan announced a new EUR 500,000 (US\$ 570,000) contribution to the 2015 Gaza Emergency Appeal. These funds will support the urgent humanitarian needs that arose following the recent hostilities, including contributing to vital shelter assistance for thousands of Palestine refugee families whose homes were damaged or destroyed during the conflict. Ireland's support could not be more timely as UNRWA in Gaza was forced in January to suspend support for self-help emergency shelter assistance and rental subsidies due to lack of funds.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl accompanied the delegation. Mr. Krähenbühl said: "The people and government of Ireland set a great example to the world in terms of their support for Palestine refugees. The strong support for the people of Gaza voiced by the Irish government during the recent hostilities was a voice for justice and a voice for dignity. While at the same time, the generous financial support is giving the most vulnerable a chance to rebuild their lives."

Minister Flanagan said: "I have seen for myself today the appalling effects of last year's conflict in Gaza. The sheer scale of the destruction and the devastating humanitarian impact on a largely refugee population is truly shocking. As a steadfast supporter of the Palestinian people, Ireland has been generous in its response to the Gaza crisis. I am pleased to announce today that Ireland is providing a further EUR 500,000 for UNRWA's response in Gaza. Ireland will continue to support UNRWA as it provides a range of social services including health and education services, to some 5 million Palestine refugees."

The 2014 contribution from Ireland to UNRWA totaled over US\$ 8 million, including US\$ 1.3 million towards the Gaza Flash Appeal and US\$ 1.3 million for the Syria Regional Crisis Response Plan. Ireland is a long standing supporter of UNRWA and has played a significant role in promoting respect and protection of human rights for Palestine refugees. An AdCom member since 2008, financial contributions from Ireland to the Agency have totaled over US\$ 42 million over the past five years.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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

Financial support to UNRWA has not kept pace with an increased demand for services caused by growing numbers of registered refugees, expanding need, and deepening poverty. As a result, the Agency's General Fund (GF), supporting UNRWA's core activities and 97 per cent reliant on voluntary contributions, has begun each year with a large projected deficit. Currently the deficit stands at US\$ 81 million.

For more information, please contact:

Christopher Gunness

UNRWA Spokesperson

Mobile:

+972 (0)54 240 2659

Office:

+972 (0)2 589 0267

c.gunness@unrwa.org (link sends e-mail)

Sami Mshasha

Chief of Communications & Arabic Language Spokesperson

Mobile:

+972 (0)54 216 8295

Office:

+972 (0)2 589 0724

s.mshasha@unrwa.org

<http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/irish-foreign-minister-announces-new-%E2%82%AC500000-contribution-during-gaza-visit>