
RESTORING HOPE TO PALESTINE REFUGEE COMMUNITY IN SYRIA

29 October 2014

Syria

UNRWA Deputy Commissioner-General Margot Ellis has inaugurated a rehabilitated school for Palestine refugee children in Qabr Essit camp in Sayeda Zeinab on the outskirts of Damascus. The Alma-Yarmouk School has been closed since the conflict forced the majority of the camp's 25,000 residents to seek refuge in safer areas. Although it was severely damaged by the intense armed exchanges, the school is now a symbol of UNRWA efforts to restore services to Palestine refugees in Qabr Essit.

The newly-painted halls and singing children now provide refreshing contrast to another UNRWA school across the street, which still remains a destroyed shell, its children still displaced.

"This is an important example of Palestinian resilience. Wherever possible, UNRWA will try to help Palestine refugees rebuild their lives," Ms. Ellis said.

The Director-General of the General Authority of Palestine Arab Refugees in Syria, Ali Mustafa, noted the supportive role of the community and of the government, and echoed the hopeful and determined message of the Qabr Essit community. "This is a proud people whose steadfastness will not falter. We look forward to a time when conditions will enable us to rebuild Sbeineh, Husseiniyeh, Ein el-Tal and Yarmouk," Mr. Mustafa said.

Ms. Ellis also spoke to displaced refugees in the UNRWA Safad School collective shelter in Rukn Eddin in Damascus. Over 400 refugees, mostly displaced from Qaboun in 2012, live in crowded conditions, with only plastic sheets separating families.

The visit included meetings with high-level officials, including the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, the Minister of Social Affairs and the Minister of Education. Ms. Ellis stressed the need for expanded assistance to Yarmouk and other camps as well as the importance of restoring communities by allowing return once security conditions permit. Many of the 3,700 UNRWA staff in Syria reiterated to Ms. Ellis their commitment to serving their communities, but at the same time revealed unprecedented levels of stress and hardship.

UNRWA operations in Syria are a lifeline for some 460,000 Palestine refugees, and sustained funding is required to ensure families and communities survive the conflict.

[Click here](#) to read a story about the rebuilding of Qabr Essit.

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\$ 56 million.

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