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UNRWA Commissioner-General calls for action to ease plight of Palestine refugees

Amman – Commissioner General of UNRWA Karen Koning AbuZayd has called for action to ease the plight of Palestine refugees. Speaking to delegates participating in UNRWA's Advisory Commission meeting, which opened in Amman this morning, Ms. AbuZayd appealed to concerned actors to address the causes of conflict. "The political front is where we need your leadership", the Commissioner General told the meeting. "I see my role as one of informing political leaders of the facts on the ground and of encouraging action that will ease the plight of the refugees", said AbuZayd, expressing hope that a unity government in Palestine will become a reality, thus paving the way for revitalizing the peace process.

The meeting of the Advisory Commission, the third held in Amman this year, was opened by the current Chairperson, Mr. Frans Makken, Head of Mission of the Representative Office of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Palestinian Authority. In addition to the updates on recent developments in the area of operations, management reform and the Agency's financial situation, the two-day meeting will discuss the Agency's planning and budgeting assumptions for the next biennium, and will review the Commissioner General's annual report to be submitted to the General Assembly later this year.

Updating the participants on recent developments in the region, AbuZayd said that the situation in Gaza has deteriorated dramatically, adding that food distribution had been delayed because of severe difficulties getting goods through Karni crossing. AbuZayd added that since June, civilian casualties in the conflict have been depressingly numerous, pointing out that over 280 people have been killed and 815 injured in the conflict. Referring to the situation in the West Bank, AbuZayd expressed concern over the impact of the barrier and its associated regime "which seems to be fading from international attention". She emphasized that the situation in the West Bank was "as devastating as what is so plain to see in Gaza".

Referring to the situation in Lebanon, the Commissioner General praised UNRWA staff who, during the conflict, acted "no less than heroically, keeping services running, delivering emergency assistance and opening school buildings to displaced Palestinians and Lebanese alike". AbuZayd thanked the Lebanese government for including UNRWA projects for refugee camp improvements in the recovery plan presented recently at Stockholm conference. She also commended the role played by Jordan and Syria in facilitating the movement and accommodation of people – including the refugees – fleeing the conflict.

The Commissioner General commended the support provided by the host authorities to UNRWA and Palestine refugees. AbuZayd cited the cooperation between UNRWA and the Jordanian government, which has most recently resulted in the signing of hospitalization agreement to ensure that refugees in need have easy access to affordable hospital services. She also praised the Syrian government for granting refuge to Palestinians fleeing persecution in Iraq, while highlighting the need to find solutions for those still seeking safety.

The Advisory Commission was established under the General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 to advise and assist the Commissioner-General of UNRWA in the execution of its programme. On 8 December 2005, the General Assembly decided to expand the membership of the Advisory Commission from 11 to 24 members and observers.