
Jerusalem, 20 April 2007

Palestinian refugees: European Union Contributes €66 million to UNRWA's General Fund for 2007

Mr. John Kjaer, head of the European Commission Technical Assistance Office for the West Bank and Gaza Strip (ECTAO), and Mr. Filippo Grandi, the Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, today signed a contribution agreement for €66 million at a ceremony in Qalandia camp, an increase of more than €1.5 million over the past year.

Today's signing was the first instalment in an agreement made between the EU and UNRWA in which the EU pledged €264 million to support UNRWA's General Fund 2007-2010. The funds will pay salaries for UNRWA's teachers, doctors and social workers, enabling UNRWA to maintain delivery of essential services to Palestine refugees. The EU's continuing support to UNRWA is an essential element of the EU's strategy for the Middle East peace process.

Speaking at the signing, Mr. Kjaer said: "The EU is highly sensitive to the plight of Palestine's refugees. We recognise that they are amongst the most vulnerable at this time of social and economic crisis. UNRWA has been at the forefront of efforts to help alleviate the daily hardships facing Palestine's refugees, and the EU is proud to support UNRWA's work through this increased contribution. "

Mr. Grandi thanked the EU, saying: "UNRWA's efforts would not be possible without the on-going support of generous and committed donors. Therefore I would like to extend special appreciation to the European Community. The past year has been a period of great need throughout the Palestine refugee community, and the support you have shown today is a symbol of your interest and concern."

Since 1971 the European Community has regularly supported UNRWA, becoming one of its largest donors. During the period 2003-2006, the European Commission provided €246 million to UNRWA's General Fund. This financial support, when combined with contributions from individual EU Member States, represents more than half of UNRWA's total budget.

Established in 1949, UNRWA today provides education, healthcare, social services, and emergency aid to 4.4 million Palestine refugees living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan.

It is the largest UN operation in the Middle East. The United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate, most recently extending it until June 2008.

Additional information on the EU's relations with the West Bank and Gaza at:

<http://www.delwbq.ec.europa.eu/en/index.htm>

Alix de Mauny, Press and Information Manager
+ 972 2 541 5888
alix.de-mauny@ec.europa.eu

Additional information on UNRWA
Gina Benevento, Chief Public Information
+972 2 589072
g.benevento@unrwa.org