

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AT CORE OF UNRWA'S NEW REFUGEE CAMP IMPROVEMENT PILOT IN GAZA

[المشاركة المجتمعية في صلب مشروع الأونروا التجريبي الجديد لتطوير مخيمات اللاجئين في غزة](#)

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UNRWA announced the commencement of the first stage of its camp improvement pilot project at a town hall meeting in Deir El Balah refugee Camp, in Gaza today. Using a community participation approach, the three year US \$ 40 million initiative is generously funded by the Programme of the Gulf Cooperation Council for the Reconstruction of Gaza through the Islamic Development Bank.

The meeting was attended by camp residents, senior officials, the Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Robert Turner, the pilot project team and other UNRWA and UN staff. In addition to outlining the objectives of the project, a significant portion of time was dedicated to hearing and answering questions from residents of the camp.

Through consultations on prioritizing needs, participation in surveys and focus groups and access to online tools, camp residents will have the opportunity to participate in setting priorities and developing a master improvement plan that decides how the camp improvement donation is spent. The pilot project is being led by a dedicated project team based in Deir El Balah and it will be jointly planned and implemented by UNRWA's Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme (ICIP) and its Relief and Social Services Programme (RSSP).

"This camp improvement pilot project is about improving the quality of life for Palestine refugees in Deir El Balah Camp, with the voice and needs of the community at its core," said UNRWA's Director of Operations in Gaza, Robert Turner. "We're grateful to our generous donor for entrusting us not only with payment in advance of a project design - something that is virtually unheard of in the humanitarian sector - but that in doing so it gives the Agency and camp residents an opportunity to try old ideas in a new way."

The project comes at a key time for Palestine refugees in Gaza. More than seven months after the summer 2014 conflict, there has not been nearly enough good news to report. Whilst some 60,000 Palestine refugee families have been able to complete the repair of their homes through funding from UNRWA, thousands more have not. Not a single totally destroyed home in Gaza has been rebuilt. "We recognize these are very tough days for all Palestine refugees, which is why projects such as this one offer a glimmer of hope and a chance to look to the future. As with all of Gaza, we don't yet know the details of what that future looks like in Deir El Balah. But we do know that standards of living and socioeconomic development cannot be separated from the living conditions of Palestine refugees – the quality of a camp's physical environment has a direct bearing on the quality of everyday life," said Robert Turner.

Deir El Balah Camp was established in 1948 and is the smallest of eight Palestine refugee camps in the Gaza Strip. The camp has more than 21,000 residents and overcrowding and poverty are key features of everyday life.

Traditionally, the Agency's approach to camp improvement has supported activities such as ensuring the provision of adequate housing to all refugees; the provision of adequate physical infrastructure within the refugee camps and gathering areas, including better access to transportation and road services; the provision of adequate social infrastructure in the camp such as UNRWA and other public facilities, common urban spaces and market places to serve all refugees; and the sustainability of the entire camp development process, with an emphasis on economic self-reliance and long-lasting impact.

More information and regular updates can be found at: <http://deb.unrwa.ps>

### 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\$ 100 million.

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