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Redoubling Youth at Risk of Radicalization amid Growing Insecurity, Unmet Humanitarian Needs, Palestine Refugees Agency Chief Tells Fourth Committee

SEVENTY-FIRST SESSION, 21ST Meeting (PM)

Rapporteur of Working Group on UNRWA Financing Urges Governments to Provide Agency with Sustained, Predictable Funding

Young Palestine refugees continued to face unquantifiable challenges, including the risk of radicalization due to mounting insecurity and the frustration of unmet humanitarian needs as resulting from the lack of sustained and predictable funding, the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) heard today as it took up the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

"When I look at the region, I sense the risks of radicalization of desperate young people," said Pierre Krähenbühl, UNRWA's Commissioner-General, as he addressed the Committee. While few young Palestinians had responded to the calls of terrorist groups like Da'esh to date, global efforts were the key to reducing their sense of insecurity and meeting their humanitarian needs.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, military rule and occupation defined every aspect of public and private life, from restrictions on movement to punitive house demolitions, and illegal settlement expansion, he said. There was no way to quantify the cumulative human toll of Israel's occupation, he said, describing the figures as "staggering". In addition, more than 60 per cent of the 560,000 Palestine refugees in Syria had been displaced when the conflict in that country had broken out in 2011, he pointed out, noting that most of the camps built for them had sustained significant damage.

"There are 500,000 children in our school system, which would make it the third largest in the United States, after New York City and Los Angeles," he said. However, UNRWA's financial situation remained a cause for serious concern that had almost led to the postponement of the school year. Despite robust management measures and reforms, the Agency still faced a \$74 million shortfall, he observed.

Kjetil J. Halvorsen, Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA presented that body's report, noting that while several donors had come forward with additional contributions, a gap remained to be bridged. The Working Group urged Governments to provide un-earmarked multi-year funding, as well as sustained and predictable contributions to the Agency.

With the floor open for the general debate, the observer for the State of Palestine emphasized that unresolved conflicts did not simply dissipate with the passage of time, but rather, were compounded by the absence of just solutions. She also noted that, out of the five fields of UNRWA's operations, only the situation in Jordan remained stable, yet the needs there had grown alongside rising unemployment and poverty.

Jordan's representative pointed out that the Agency's financial deficit had not been caused by increasing numbers of refugees, but by the lack of a just solution to Israel's occupation.

UNRWA was not a mere humanitarian agency, but an artery of life, she stressed, highlighting the frustration and disappointment among Palestinian youth, which, if left unchecked, might compel them to embrace violent extremism.

Israel's representative stressed that although Hamas played a destructive role in Gaza, the "internationally designated terror organization" was mentioned only once in UNRWA's report. Hamas was cynically abusing Israel's every humanitarian step and measure, and often obstructed her country's vigorous reconstruction efforts, she added.

Also speaking today were representatives of Venezuela (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Egypt, Sri Lanka, Mexico, Ecuador, Thailand and United Arab Emirates, in addition to an observer for the European Union.

The Fourth Committee will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Thursday, 3 November, to conclude its general debate on UNRWA.

Background

Before the Committee were the report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (document [A/71/13](#)); report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (document [A/71/350](#)); report of the Secretary-General on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues (document [A/71/343](#)); report of the Secretary-General on persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities (document [A/71/340](#)); and a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (document [A/71/335](#)).

Introductory Statements

PIERRE KRÄHENBÜHL, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), said the world must continue to care about the fate of 5.3 million refugees because the conditions they faced were worse than they had been at any time since 1948, adding that 50 years of occupation and 10 years of blockade were etched painfully into the soul and identity of the refugee community. Even more importantly, a young generation of Palestine refugees was growing up and losing faith in the value of politics, compromise and international diplomacy.

More than 60 per cent of the 560,000 refugees in Syria had been displaced when the conflict had broken out in 2011, he continued, noting that most of the camps built for them had sustained significant damage. They struggled to survive in the devastated landscapes of Aleppo and Yarmouk, and in the battlegrounds of Khan Eshieh and Dera'a. In Gaza, the population had been affected by repeated wars, through which children as young as nine years of age had lived during the course of three highly volatile conflicts over the past eight years. Since freedom of movement was virtually non-existent, 90 per cent of UNRWA's 260,000 students had never left the Gaza Strip throughout their lives, he pointed out. Meanwhile, unemployment rates had reached world-record levels, with joblessness among youth at a truly staggering 60 per cent. There was no way to properly map out the psychological scars, he said, citing the lack of opportunities and the increase in the suicide rate.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, military rule and occupation defined every aspect of public and private life, from restrictions on movement to punitive house demolitions, and illegal settlement expansion, he said. There was no way to quantify the cumulative human toll of the Israeli occupation, he said, describing the figures as "staggering".

According to United Nations estimates, \$4 billion in Palestinian incomes was lost annually, in Area C alone, due to the military occupation. Despite the generosity of donors, Palestine's economic base was being continually eroded, which limited sustainable growth and job creation. Jordan was the only place where UNRWA could count on stability, whereas high poverty and unemployment rates in Lebanon were the leading challenges to the Agency's operations. "When I look at the region, I sense the risks of radicalization of desperate young people," he said, pointing out that extremists were constantly on the lookout for new recruits. To date, few young Palestinians had responded to the calls of terrorist groups like Da'esh, yet global efforts were the key to reducing the sense of insecurity and meeting humanitarian needs.

UNRWA, for its part, navigated that complex environment through its education, health and poverty mitigation services. As a quasi-governmental service provider, the Agency continued to deliver essential services to 59 official camps and refugee-minority communities. "There are 500,000 children in our school system, which would make it the third largest in the United States, after New York City and Los Angeles," he said. Furthermore, UNRWA remained a determined development actor, adaptive to the most severe challenges on the ground. Citing an example from Syria, he said the Agency had reached 95 per cent of the refugees in need of cash assistance as part of its emergency interventions. In addition, it had rebuilt two destroyed schools and children were back in the classrooms despite the warfare. He said that, amid extraordinary challenges, he had front-loaded the major reforms of the medium-term strategy for 2016-2021, by rolling them out in the first half of year one.

In April, he said, UNRWA had rolled out its "food to cash" transition in Jordan, Lebanon and the West Bank. In place of bulk food distribution to the most vulnerable refugees, the Agency had switched to electronic cards and had distributed food to 160,000 people. Despite a range of internal measures, however, UNRWA's financial situation remained a cause for serious concern that had almost led to the postponement of the school year, he said. Amid robust management measures and reforms, the \$74 million shortfall remained a cause for concern. "We are immensely grateful to our donors and hosts for the remarkable support received, yet the current system is not managing to bring the needed predictability of funding," he said, stressing the risks to the stability of the Middle East and to the development Palestine refugees had achieved over decades. The Agency had

invested significant time in exploring different avenues to financial stability. In coordination with the Secretary-General and partners, major outreach had been undertaken with non-traditional donors. "UNRWA is leaving no stone unturned in the quest for broad and diverse support." In that regard, it was very encouraging to see the commitments made by Member States in the New York Declaration, he said, adding that the current discussion presented a timely opportunity to ensure predictable and sufficient funding.

KJETIL J. HALVORSEN (Norway), Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, introduced that body's report (document [A/71/350](#)), noting that the Group had met five times before adopting it in August. For the second time, the Working Group's meetings had been held while UNRWA was facing another financial shortfall, he noted. Despite its efforts to improve effectiveness and additional contributions from several donors, the shortfall was \$74 million, he said. In September, the Commissioner-General had updated its Special Report to alert the General Assembly to the dire financial situation, and while several donors had come forward with additional contributions, a gap remained to be bridged. The Working Group urged all Governments to increase their contributions where possible. He went on to urge Governments to provide un-earmarked multi-year funding, as well as sustained and predictable contributions to UNRWA, in accordance with recommendations made at the World Humanitarian Summit. He further urged them to disburse contributions early in the year when feasible, which would allow the Agency to better plan its activities. Expressing the Agency's gratitude to those Governments that had traditionally demonstrated generosity towards Palestine refugees and to UNRWA, including major donors and Gulf Cooperation Council partners, he urged them to maintain or increase their funding. He also encouraged all Member States to consider the Secretary-General's report and Agency-related resolutions with a view to addressing recurring budget deficits and sufficiently supporting its vital work.

Interactive Dialogue

The representative of [Israel](#), expressing regret that UNRWA's important work was overshadowed by its use of humanitarian funding for advocacy, said the [Commissioner-General's report](#) provided an unbalanced description of Palestinian refugee problems. Noting that UNRWA did not have a General Assembly mandate to conduct itself in a one-sided, biased approach, he said it continued to point fingers at one country while not mentioning others, which did not serve the Palestinian people and did not align with the Agency's mandate. Objecting to any comparison between his own country and Syria, he said the report also failed to address information about UNRWA workers advocating violence on social media. Israel had provided a detailed account of that issue in 2015, but had only received a vague response that the matter was under investigation. When would the Agency demonstrate greater responsibility and take steps to avoid a recurrence? While noting that paragraph 3 of the [report](#) mentioned that the volatile security situation was due partly to the constant firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel, he emphasized that it did not mention who should be held accountable for those attacks. Why could UNRWA not speak about what Hamas was doing, since that would send the right message and help the Palestinian people? he asked, describing them as refugees under the control of a terrorist organization.

He went on to say he was disturbed by the expression "lack of" in relation to the reconstruction of Gaza, stressing that the statement contradicted reports by other United Nations agencies and did not mention Israel's contributions. The [report](#) elaborated on the restricted movement of goods into Gaza and lamented the additional costs required to monitor construction materials entering the enclave, but had failed to address the wider security context that had led to those decisions. It should be made clear that Hamas regularly confiscated and diverted materials intended for Gaza's reconstruction to their own activities, actively preparing for conflict, he said. Paragraph 28 of the report failed to mention who was besieging Yarmouk, and that 40 UNRWA workers had been killed in Syria while 28 were missing, detained or kidnapped. He asked if any investigation had been launched into the well-being of those employees, because that was in stark contrast with aspects of the report dealing with Israel, he asked, wondering whether accountability was only required from one Member State.

The observer for the [State of Palestine](#) asked how calls for dignity and rights for the Palestinian people could be seen as one-sided or biased. The deteriorating economic and humanitarian conditions in the region were hampering UNRWA's ability to respond to refugee needs, she said, emphasizing that the overwhelming majority of Palestine refugees had stayed close to home awaiting a just resolution of their plight. As the situation had declined, however, more and more of them had been compelled to leave the region, she said. There was a deep sense of despair and insecurity, coupled with hopelessness and fear, and many were joining the exodus to Europe and beyond. Seeking elaboration on that situation, including as a result of the Syrian crisis, she asked how to stabilize the community during the current volatile period.

The representative of [Egypt](#) asked how the Agency's work contributed to advancement of the commitments set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development among the Palestine refugee population. UNRWA faced serious funding difficulties, he noted, asking how it was coping and what efforts it was undertaking to expand and diversify its donor base.

The representative of [Malaysia](#) asked for further details about the situation of Palestine refugees in Syria, including the 450,000 remaining in that country, and about the Agency's efforts to provide them with essential humanitarian services.

Mr. KRÄHENBÜHL, Commissioner-General, responded to questions from Israel's representative by saying it was clear that the Agency's mandate, given by the General Assembly, related to the protection of Palestine refugees in different areas as well as the provision of services to them. That entailed dialogue with Israel, Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan on issues of Palestine refugee rights. UNRWA's first course of action was to raise the matter with Governments and parties on the ground, he said. For example, if a child was affected during a military incursion by Israeli security forces, UNRWA would document that, analyse it and sit down with representatives in a face-to-face dialogue. They would seek to understand the circumstances in order to avoid a repetition. Such efforts also entailed public advocacy to raise general concern about the situation of Palestinian refugees, he said. Regarding social media postings by staffers, he said that was a documented fact, recalling that in 2015, UNRWA had received 100 allegations – which represented 0.5 per cent of its staff – and had investigated all of them. That was hardly evidence of a widespread practice, but it was serious and measures must be taken, he emphasized, pointing out that had been only 15 such allegations in 2016. The Agency had worked on training and other preventive measures, and there was nothing vague about its response.

On the [report's](#) failure to mention Hamas, he said international humanitarian law applied to all in similar ways, State or non-State actors, and imposed similar accountability on all of them in situations of armed conflict. UNRWA had also taken the theft of materials extremely seriously and had engaged with General Mordechai publicly and in private on that issue. Concerning the slow rate of reconstruction in Gaza, he said UNRWA had only received 39 per cent of the funding called for at the Cairo Conference. On the restrictions of movement, he said every State involved in armed conflict had a responsibility to reconcile security measures with obligations under international humanitarian law. The Gaza blockade amounted to collective punishment, and there were consequences to the measures taken to protect Israel's safety. Regarding Yarmouk, he said it was clear that the Government of Syria had besieged the town. He pointed out inaccuracies in the numbers of UNRWA personnel killed in Syria, pointing out that 18 had been killed and 25 were missing. He also noted that 11 staff members had been killed during the 50 days of the Gaza conflict, while stressing that he did not wish to engage in finger-pointing, but only to see who was responsible. In Gaza, the answer was a matter of public record, and in Syria, it was a mix of Government and armed groups, which was harder to establish. Responding to the observer for the [State of Palestine](#), he said that, of the 560,000 Palestine refugees in Syria, 120,000 had fled the country entirely. Of those, an estimated 31,000 were in Lebanon and 16,000 had arrived in Jordan from Syria. Both countries had since closed their borders, and those forced to flee Syria after that had taken the northern route, with a few thousand arriving in Turkey and a thousand in Egypt. Between 35,000 and 45,000 had joined Syrians and others on their way to Europe, and it was difficult to document those in detail because some would have travelled under Syrian travel documents. That spill-over of instability in the Middle East could increase in the future, he noted. In response to Egypt's representative, he said UNRWA was an active contributor to the Sustainable Development Goals through long-term efforts in education, primary health care and other spheres. As for attempts to diversify UNRWA's funding base, such efforts had been successful with the Gulf countries, and the Agency had also extended outreach to other countries in an attempt to strengthen support. Significant efforts had been made with such countries as India, China, Brazil and the Republic of Korea. Responding to Malaysia's representative, he said 60 to 65 per cent of Palestine refugees remaining in Syria had been displaced, recalling that before the war, they had enjoyed access to employment and the dignity of self-sufficiency.

The representative of [Israel](#) said that his statement about 40 UNRWA employees having been killed was a mistake. Concerning the issue of restrictions on movement, he said that his question had not been about Palestinian youth, but about restrictions on UNRWA personnel. He asked again why Hamas was not mentioned in the [report](#), while expressing disappointment with the Agency's decision on advocacy because its mandate was to help refugees.

Mr. KRÄHENBÜHL said that there were differences of perspectives that could not all be resolved during the meeting, and that he looked forward to ongoing dialogue in that regard.

General Debate

FEDA ABDELHADI-NASSER, observer for the [State of Palestine](#), said the overwhelming majority of refugees had remained in the region, awaiting a just solution to their plight. However, with the precipitous decline of regional conditions, refugees had been compelled to leave in search of human security and a better life. Commending UNRWA staff for their daily provision of assistance to meet basic needs, she said that they promoted resilience among the refugees and preserved human dignity. Noting that 5.3 million Palestine refugees were dispersed in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied territories, she emphasized that unresolved conflicts did not simply dissipate with the passage of time, but rather, were compounded in the absence of just solutions.

During the long years of exile and dispossession, the continued denial of rights had forced successive generations to endure hardship, deprivation, marginalization and repeated displacement, she said. Noting that less than two months had elapsed since the Summit on Refugees and Migrants, and the General Assembly's adoption of the New York Declaration, she said that the ongoing crises compelled immediate follow-up. "States are duty-bound – politically, legally and morally – to uphold the commitments made," she said, emphasizing that it was time to translate words into meaningful action. With the support of the international community, UNRWA had helped to alleviate the hardships of Palestine refugees through its education, health-care, social and microfinance assistance programmes, she said, adding that they had also provided protection and emergency aid in periods of crisis.

As for conditions and dynamics in UNRWA's five fields of operation, she noted that the situation in Jordan remained stable, yet needs had grown alongside rising unemployment and poverty. In Lebanon, pervasive instability, abject poverty and lack of opportunity had severely affected Palestine refugees, she said, expressing appreciation for the Agency's advocacy for refugee access to the labour market in that country. In Gaza, nearly 10 years of the Israeli blockade had caused aid dependency among most of the population, while

in the West Bank, violent military raids by the occupying forces had caused death and injury to civilians, she said. Similarly, the situation in Syria remained alarming as the crisis there intensified. Stressing the fundamental principle of non-refoulement and equal treatment of refugees, she went on to echo the humanitarian appeals for access for all fleeing the Syrian conflict. UNRWA must be allowed to carry out its mandate without hindrance or the imposition of additional costs and burdens. Turning to the structural funding of the Agency, she said its constant financial shortfalls had become debilitating and risked interruption of its core programmes. Such an outcome must be averted, she said, appealing to the General Assembly for a sustainable remedy.

DOUGLAS NICOMEDES ARCA VIVAS ([Venezuela](#)), speaking for the Non-Aligned Movement, expressed serious concern about violations of the immunity of UNRWA personnel, condemning the killing of United Nations staff and the destruction of its premises in the strongest terms. He reaffirmed that the Agency's mandate was essential until a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees was reached. "Palestine refugees in many places face existential threats and are sinking deeper into poverty and desperation," he said, adding that the situation had been exacerbated by the armed conflict in Syria. The illegal and inhumane Israeli blockade in Gaza obstructed humanitarian aid, impeded the reconstruction of homes, hindered economic and social recovery and imposed severe isolation on the Palestinian population.

He went on to point out that Israeli authorities continued to restrict the movement of UNRWA personnel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, calling on that country immediately to lift the restrictions. The Non-Aligned Movement also called for the lifting of the illegal Gaza blockade, which would be the only way for refugees to decrease their dependence on aid provided by UNRWA. Addressing the entire international community, he emphasized that it must uphold its moral, political and legal responsibilities to end Israel's illegal policies. Furthermore, the Agency's funding shortfall undermined its efforts to meet the needs of some 5.24 million registered Palestine refugees under its mandate by the end of 2015. The Movement appealed for urgent support for UNRWA programmes and to help the Agency overcome its serious financial crisis, including expenditures arising from the serious socioeconomic and humanitarian situation and the instability in all its fields of operation.

PIERRE-CHRISTOPHE CHATZISAVAS, [European Union](#), paid tribute to UNRWA, while emphasizing the obligation of all relevant authorities to protect humanitarian workers. Once again the Agency's financial sustainability was threatened, only a year after a crisis had been narrowly averted through its own "unprecedented efforts" and those of donors including the European Union, he noted. All stakeholders must work for a rejuvenated UNRWA, he said, once again urging new donors to share the burden in order to ensure that the increasing needs of Palestine refugees were met. The European Union and its members remained the largest contributors to the Agency, providing almost half of its donor support to its programme budget and about 33 per cent of its overall operations. He urged further steps to reduce budgets while protecting the delivery of core services, particularly those required by the most vulnerable among the refugee population.

He went on to stress that political progress was as needed in Gaza to meet humanitarian needs there, he said, calling upon Israel to end the closure while acknowledging that country's legitimate security concerns. Urging both parties to undertake confidence-building measures, such as the 13 September signing of the electricity agreement, he also stressed that intra-Palestinian reconciliation, as well as an end to indiscriminate attacks and the illicit arms build-up by militant groups, were critical. As for Syria, he condemned the widespread violations of international law by all parties involved in that country, and called for a renewed cessation of hostilities as well as safe, comprehensive and unhindered humanitarian access. The European Union pledged support to countries hosting Syrian refugees, he said, also affirming the bloc's determination to continue to work towards a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

SONIA ISHAQ AHMAD SUGHAYAR ([Jordan](#)), expressing concern about the financial challenges facing UNRWA, emphasized that the United Nations was responsible for ensuring its sustainable funding until a solution was found to the question of Palestine refugees. The financial deficit had not been caused by increasing numbers of refugees, but by the lack of a just solution to Israel's occupation, she pointed out. UNRWA was not a mere humanitarian agency, but an artery of life, she stressed, highlighting the frustration and disappointment among Palestinian youth, which, if left unchecked, might compel them to embrace violent extremism. The responsibility to help refugees must be borne by the entire international community. Encouraging the United Nations to seek alternative sources of funding, including partnerships with private sector and international non-governmental organizations, she said her own country was a strategic partner of UNRWA, and hosted the largest number of Palestine refugees at almost 42 per cent. Despite limited resources, Jordan would continue to support them, she pledged.

YUMAIRA COROMOTO RODRIGUEZ SILVA ([Venezuela](#)), speaking in her national capacity, emphasized that Israel's occupation had caused suffering for the Palestinian people and made a two-State solution impossible. The illegal practices of Israeli authorities had made any opportunity for development impossible. The occupying Power indiscriminately exploited natural resources belonging to the Palestinian people, she said, reiterating her country's repudiation of those practices. She urged stronger financing for UNRWA, and said that measures to establish an international system of protection for the Palestinian people should be considered concurrently, with the Agency's assistance.

AHMED EL-SHANDAWILY ([Egypt](#)), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, said more than 500,000 refugees had been educated through UNRWA in the past year. The importance of that aspect of the Agency's work could not be overstated, since quality education provided much-needed hope to Palestinian youth. Moreover, education was the first barrier against extremism, a fact that everyone must realize, he emphasized. Egypt appealed to international donors to increase their generous support for UNRWA, he said, noting with concern its \$74 million programme budget deficit for 2016. Expressing strong support for efforts to explore the possibility of further United Nations budgetary funding for the Agency, he said it had done all that it could to ensure maximum efficiency and cost-effectiveness in its operations.

SONALI SAMARASINGHE ([Sri Lanka](#)), acknowledging UNRWA's efforts in maintaining schools and educational infrastructure, said it was crucial to turn children away from violence.

Voicing concern about the human rights situation in that highly volatile region, he emphasized that conditions in the Gaza Strip were the result of Israel's 10-year-long land and sea blockade, as well as repeated escalations of hostilities. "The physical and mental toll on Palestinians is horrendous." Nevertheless, they continued to cling to hope for a better future, and in fact, he said, noting that much of that hope derived from the dedication of UNRWA staff. The ongoing violence in Syria had created large-scale movements of people, further complicating the Agency's work. The international community must acknowledge the poverty, rising unemployment and various forms of discrimination that Palestine refugees suffered, he said. UNRWA's financial crisis hindered its work in the Middle East, and the international community must step up its support and contributions.

MERAV HORSANDI ([Israel](#)) expressed concern about UNRWA's illegitimate political advocacy, especially its spokesperson's one-sided and provocative statements. In recent years, the Agency had invested extensive resources in advocacy at the expense of its beneficiaries, seeking to serve the Palestinian political agenda. Although Hamas played a destructive role in Gaza, the internationally designated terror organization was mentioned only once in UNRWA's report, she noted, adding that, by cynically abusing every humanitarian step that Israel introduced, Hamas often obstructed its own vigorous efforts to boost the energy infrastructure and ease movement. The terrorist group confiscated, diverted and smuggled humanitarian resources meant for Gaza residents, redirecting them to satisfy its own priorities – the excavation of tunnels, the manufacture of rockets and the construction of training camps. Even when Hamas committed war crimes by using civilian areas to target Israeli citizens, public reports and statements issued by the Agency avoided mentioning Hamas by name, he said, adding that UNRWA's employees, while quick to condemn Israel, showed significant reluctance to report about Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups. Israel expected UNRWA, as an organization that continually called for accountability and transparency, to abide by some standards and to report accurately, he said, stressing that Hamas was cynically abusing every humanitarian step and measure introduced by his country, and often obstructed Israel's vigorous reconstruction efforts.

JUAN SANDOVAL MENDOZA ([Mexico](#)), expressing support for UNRWA's work, said its humanitarian services were especially important given the precarious situation in the Middle East, especially Syria. The large numbers of civilian victims and the wide-scale displacements had created an extremely complex context for the Agency's functioning. Pledging that his country would provide a financial contribution to support UNRWA, he called for a comprehensive solution that would recognize the State of Israel's right to exist while providing for the establishment of a politically viable Palestinian State, within secure, internationally recognized borders.

AMÉRICA LOURDES PEREIRA SOTOMAYOR ([Ecuador](#)), associating herself with the Non-Aligned Movement, noted that UNRWA's report highlighted a drastic increase of enforced displacement and the resistance of certain countries to hosting Palestine refugees. Ecuador had 60,000 refugees, the highest number in Latin America, 95 per cent of whom were from Colombia, she said, emphasizing that people in Ecuador were not consigned to ghettos or camps, but were able to enjoy their human rights in full. The report also noted the ongoing instability in the region and the resurgence of violence from which Palestinians suffered, especially in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. People living there had no rights, she said, while affirming the need to support the work of UNRWA and to provide the Agency with adequate and predictable financing.

WONGSAKORN CHAICHANA ([Thailand](#)) said his country was very concerned about UNRWA's serious financial crisis and its persistent funding shortfall, which undermined the Agency's ability to meet the needs of Palestine refugees. Calling upon Member States to provide the Agency with sustained support, he recalled that since 1978, Thailand had consistently made financial contributions to UNRWA and had responded to the Emergency Flash Appeal launched to meet the humanitarian needs of Palestinians affected by the 2014 Gaza clashes. Within the framework of the Conference among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, Thailand had collaborated with Japan in building capacity in the human resources management and tourism areas, he said. The fact that UNRWA still provided assistance on the ground, 65 years after its establishment, was a regrettable sign that sustainable peace remained elusive in the Middle East. An agreeable and comprehensive solution could only be achieved through peaceful and constructive negotiations between the concerned parties, he emphasized.

AHMED BIN DESMAL ALMEHAIRI ([United Arab Emirates](#)), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement and the Arab League, emphasized the need to continue assistance to UNRWA. Noting that its donor base must be broadened, he said that his country annually contributed \$1.8 million to the Agency's operational budget, and had given a contribution of \$15 million for educational projects during the period 2016-2017. He said the suffering would only end when the refugee issue was resolved as part of an overall settlement of the Palestine question. It was incumbent upon the international community to redouble its efforts to end Israel's illegal occupation of Arab territories and implement relevant international resolutions, especially General Assembly resolution [194](#), he stressed.

For information media. Not an official record.