

## Commission to increase support to UNRWA to EUR 237 million

**Brussels, 7 October 2002** - This week Commissioner Patten will sign a new funding convention with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The European Union will increase its support to UNRWA's general fund to € 237 million over the next four years (2002 - 2005). Funding under the new convention is intended as contribution towards the financing of UNRWA's regular programmes for the benefit of around 3.9 million Palestine refugees in UNRWA's five fields of operation: Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. UNRWA's goal is to promote the well-being of the refugees and strengthen the self-reliance of the refugee community. The overall strategy of UNRWA is to provide basic education, health, and relief and social services.

Commissioner Patten expressed concern at the difficult working situation UNRWA is facing in the West Bank and Gaza. "UNRWA and other humanitarian workers must have easy access to all areas where humanitarian aid is needed. The Commission is particularly concerned that more than twenty humanitarian missions contracted by the EU have been turned back when arriving at Israeli points of entry. I am equally concerned at delays caused to humanitarian organisations by the numerous check-points and the charges levied by Israel for security checks. Israel should immediately allow full, safe and unfettered access for international and humanitarian personnel".

The EU (Commission and Member States) is the biggest contributor to UNRWA's regular budget. Financial support to UNRWA is a key element in the EU's strategy in the Middle East, which is designed to contribute actively to reducing tension and providing a minimum of stability, in order to allow the parties to pursue their quest for peace. It also contributes to facilitating access to basic social services, reduction of poverty and an improvement of the refugees' living standard.

**Education:** Under its Education Programme, UNRWA provides education to over 475,000 pupils in its 639 elementary, preparatory and secondary schools (secondary schools in Lebanon only). UNRWA also provides educational services to over 6,000 trainees at the 8 vocational training centres and the three education science faculties in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA has developed and uses teaching material particularly for education on peace, human rights, tolerance and conflict resolution.

**Health:** UNRWA's health programme is community-based, with the emphasis placed on primary health care and with very selective use of hospital services. Primary care is provided through UNRWA's own 122 facilities. Secondary care is provided through contractual arrangements with governmental or non-governmental hospitals. Two thirds of the refugee population consists of women and children below 15 years of age, thus making mother and child care, including family planning services, a priority area.

**Relief and Social Services:** UNRWA aims to ensure a minimum standard of nutrition and shelter for refugees and the Agency's relief and social services programme supports the poorest refugee families who are unable to meet their own basic needs. The programme also facilitates longer-term social and economic development for refugees and their communities.

Together with members states the EU covers more than half of UNRWA's annual budget. Since 1972 the EC and UNRWA have signed ten funding conventions setting out the contribution to the regular budget (education, health and relief and social services programme). This is in addition to providing food aid, humanitarian assistance and support to infrastructure projects in refugee camps. In accordance with UNRWA's biennium budget the new Convention shall cover a four-year period and will be implemented by grant agreements with annual budget allocations.

In order to respond to population growth, inflation, and new long-term demands made on UNRWA by the current crisis in the Middle East, particularly in its health programme, the EU's contribution over the next four years will be significantly higher than in the past.

**For more information:** [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/med\\_mideast/intro/index.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/med_mideast/intro/index.htm)