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POLITICAL ACTORS IN MIDDLE EAST MUST MAKE COURAGEOUS CHOICES, PERSEVERE IN PURSUIT OF PEACE

HEAD OF PALESTINIAN REFUGEE RELIEF AGENCY TELLS FOURTH COMMITTEE

Says Agency Not Political Actor, But Organization Serving People Caught in Conflict for Six Decades; Attention Drawn to Chronic Overstretch, Underfunding

Notwithstanding considerable complexities, political actors had to make courageous choices and not relent in pursuit of a peaceful resolution to create a viable State of Palestine, end the occupation, and find a lasting solution to the plight of the refugees, the head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said this afternoon, as the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) launched its annual consideration of the Agency's work.

Filippo Grandi, UNRWA's Commissioner-General said that the Agency was not a political actor, but an organization that served a people caught in conflict for six decades. The Agency continued to deal with the aftermath of destruction and human suffering caused by the recent war in Gaza. While he welcomed the positive measures by Israel to improve access for a variety of consumer goods and construction materials, the situation of the civilian population remained difficult, and the rehabilitation and construction requirements were enormous.

In October, only 24 per cent of the scheduled imports for approved UNRWA projects were granted entry, he said. Crucial materials were subjected to severe restrictions, cumbersome import procedures and frequent delays. In a few weeks, UNRWA would join the rest of the United Nations family in appealing for emergency humanitarian assistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territory through a consolidated funding appeal. It was a sad reflection of the lack of progress on the political front that UNRWA was compelled to do so for the ninth time since 2000.

He went on to say that resources spent on food aid, cash grants and emergency jobs should be used to promote the institutional, human and economic development of Palestinians. Still, the Agency must not lower its collective humanitarian guard, or stop addressing the special needs of those affected by the conflict.

While the United Nations — including UNRWA — recognized Israel's legitimate security needs, he nevertheless joined the Secretary-General and international actors in urging an increase in the range of imports into Gaza. It was necessary to address the root causes of the blockade, for without fully opening the borders for people and goods, dependency would remain abnormally high, for a population that possessed skills and an entrepreneurial spirit.

While there were welcome signs of economic recovery in the West Bank, improved macroeconomic indicators had yet to transform the living standard for refugees, he said. Many Palestinians, refugees and non-refugees, continued to endure the harsh effects of the regime of fragmentation and closures that were becoming permanent.

Financial challenges continued to plague all fields of UNRWA's operations, he said. As of August, there was an \$85 million shortfall, although that gap had now been narrowed to \$50 million, thanks to contributions from the three largest donors, the European Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom. With some additional resources expected, he hoped that the gap would be fully bridged. To its financial difficulties, the Agency had also revised its strategy for resource mobilization, and had undertaken an enhanced fundraising campaign.

The representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations said that more than 60 years since "Al-Nakba" in 1948, the refugees and their descendants continued to live as an uprooted, dispossessed and exiled people. Those refugees, at 4.8 million people, constituted the largest and most protracted refugee problem in the world. Their situation remained precarious, with poverty, hardship and instability afflicting hundreds of thousands of refugee families.

She went on to say that the situation in the Gaza Strip had also remained most critical, owing to the continuing impact of Israel's "merciless blockade", and the severe consequences of last year's military campaign still gravely affected every aspect of life in Gaza. That military aggression had caused damage or destruction to at least 60,000 homes, of which 46,500 were refugee shelters. It was deplorable that the population in Gaza continued to be forced to live amidst rubble, and thus reminded every day of the brutal onslaught and the blockade.

Highlighting the report of UNRWA, she said 76.7 per cent of families in the Gaza Strip had been found to suffer from food insecurity, unemployment remained high, damaged health and sanitation networks posed major environmental and health risks, and Gaza's educational system remained severely overburdened. Nearly 90 per cent of the water was unsafe to drink, and up to 80 million litres of raw sewage were being dumped daily into the sea.

The tampering and damage to the Summer Games facilities were deplorable, she said, reaffirming support for the spirit of that initiative. Such programmes could make all the difference in the life of a traumatized and deprived child, giving hope for the possibilities of a life free from the want, misery and conflict imposed on

them and their families.

Norway's representative said that, in light of the recurring budget deficits, structural changes in the Agency were needed in three ways — how it was funded, how it operated, and how it cooperated with other stakeholders and partners.

She also said that in light of the "staggering" international effort involved in laying the foundation for enduring peace in the Middle East, donors had the responsibility to ensure that those collective efforts and contributions were spent in the most efficient way possible. It made no sense if some organizations were overfunded, while others, equally important to achieving the goal, remained "chronically underfunded".

Condemning the "cowardly and shameful" attacks against the UNRWA summer camps, Australia's representative said that fundamental improvements to the day-to-day life and prospects of Palestinian refugees across the region would only be addressed by a peace in the Middle East based on a two-State solution. Australia reiterated its call on all parties to invest — now — in further efforts to bring about that lasting peace in the region. He reiterated his country's commitment to the Agency and its "valuable work".

Also speaking during the general debate were the representatives of Egypt, Belgium (on behalf of the European Union), Saudi Arabia, Viet Nam, Morocco, Syria and Sudan.

The representatives of Lebanon, Zimbabwe and Libya also participated in the interactive dialogue with Mr. Grandi.

The Fourth Committee will meet again at 3 p.m. tomorrow, 2 November, to continue its general debate on the work of UNRWA.

Background

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) met today to begin its consideration of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

On the subject of UNRWA, the Committee had before it the report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (document A/65/13), covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2009. UNRWA was established in 1949 to contribute to the human development of Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, until a just solution is found to the refugee issue. The Agency fulfils this purpose by providing a variety of essential services within the framework of international standards. These services include education, health, relief and social services, and microfinance and micro-enterprise.

According to the report, UNRWA provided shelter in its schools to some 50,000 people displaced by the fighting during an intensive armed conflict from 27 December 2008 to 19 January 2009 in the Gaza Strip. Non-governmental organizations placed the overall number of persons killed between 1,387 and 1,417. Among the Palestinians killed, it had been estimated that between 310 and 350 were children; 5,015 Palestinians were reportedly wounded, including 11 UNRWA personnel; and 13 Israelis were killed. About 60,000 homes, belonging to refugees and non-refugees, were damaged or destroyed, as were hundreds of industrial facilities and businesses. The level of conflict in the Gaza Strip dropped off steeply after 19 January 2009, with a monthly average of five Palestinians killed and 12 Palestinians injured from February to December 2009. During the same period, one Israeli soldier was killed.

Also according to the report, the destruction of the public and private sector infrastructure had grave consequences on the economy, employment and the delivery of public services. The blockade of the Gaza Strip also resulted in most basic materials for humanitarian and development interventions being denied entry, prompting delays and suspension of vital programmes, as well as the development of an economy serviced by several hundred tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border. Supplies of industrial fuel for Gaza's power plant, cooking gas, petrol and diesel remained in short supply, leading to widespread power outages and cuts in basic sanitation services. Up to 80 million litres of raw sewage were estimated to be pumped into the sea off the Gaza Strip each day, posing major environmental and health risks to the Mediterranean region. Access to running water was scant or intermittent.

The report further says that Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) expressed grave concern at the deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and called for the "unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including of food, fuel and medical treatment". That resolution further called for States to "intensify efforts to provide arrangements and guarantees in Gaza in order to sustain a durable ceasefire and calm, including to prevent illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition and to ensure the sustained reopening of the crossing points on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access" and to recognize the "vital role played by UNRWA in providing humanitarian and economic assistance within Gaza". A year later, key paragraphs of the resolution had still not been implemented.

The report further states that, in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the occupation and closures, separated road networks, house demolitions, land confiscation, settlement expansion, curfews and military operations continued to have an adverse effect on the Palestinian population, limiting their access to land, services and resources. Construction of new sections of the barrier continued to be largely frozen. With the exception of East Jerusalem, restrictions on movement were eased for Palestinians travelling between the main West Bank urban centres, following the removal of a number of checkpoints and roadblocks and improved checkpoint procedures. In the West Bank, 21 Palestinians (including 7 minors) and 4 Israelis (including 1 minor) were killed, and 937 Palestinians (including 238 minors) and 117 Israelis (including one minor) were injured as a direct consequence of the conflict and occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory. While 2008 saw 363 incidents of settlers involved in hostile acts against Palestinians and/or their property (in itself a 118 per cent increase on 2007), in 2009, 464 such incidents took place.

The report goes on to say that in Lebanon, the general election on 7 June saw the March 14 Alliance defeat the March 8 Alliance opposition political grouping. All parties accepted the election results, paving the way for greater political stability in the country. In January, during the conflict in the Gaza Strip, tensions between Lebanon and Israel increased, and rocket fire from Lebanon into Israel temporarily led to fears of a renewed conflict. On 23 March, near Meh Meh camp, Kamal Mdhat, the second-in-command of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon, was assassinated. Nonetheless, major security incidents between Palestinian factions were relatively few, and escalated tensions between Lebanon and Israel in the second half of 2009 did not lead to any casualties. In a separate development, the remains of Alec Collett, a British freelance journalist who had been kidnapped in 1985 in Lebanon while working for UNRWA, were found in the Bekaa Valley in November. In Syria and Jordan, the Palestinian refugees continued to benefit from stable political environments, the report said.

Regarding operational developments, the report says that 2009 was marked by efforts to continue to improve the quality of UNRWA services through enhanced programme management and streamlined support services under the organizational development management reform process. Focus was also placed on better targeting of programmes to reach the most vulnerable refugees, and in responding to emergencies. Emergency programmes in the Gaza Strip were expanded significantly to meet humanitarian needs resulting from the continuation of the blockade and the Israeli operation launched in December 2008.

The report says that the ban on the entry of construction materials into the Gaza Strip halted reconstruction projects, including those that pre-dated the conflict. An estimated 1,400 refugee shelters destroyed in military operations before December 2008 had yet to be reconstructed by December 2009 and a further 3,000 were found unfit for habitation. From the end of March, UNRWA reduced its emergency food aid caseload in Gaza to about 650,000 refugees; however, it maintained a feeding programme covering all 200,000 pupils. In the West Bank, the Agency provided emergency food aid to about 60,000 families and supported about 37,000 with temporary employment.

Regarding organizational developments, the report says that the Agency's sixtieth anniversary in 2009 was marked by cultural, sports and academic events, short films, photo exhibitions, and information campaigns throughout the year. A ministerial high-level event was held at the General Assembly in September.

The report further states that at the end of 2009, UNRWA reached the conclusion of its three-year management reform initiative begun in August 2006. The organizational development plan, designed to enable the Agency to serve Palestine refugees more efficiently, was based on four levels of change: programme management; human resources management; organizational processes and systems; and leadership and management. Extensive reforms in the Agency's support services were also implemented, and a new procurement framework was introduced.

Regarding Legal matters of the Agency, the report says that Israeli authorities, raising security concerns, continued to restrict the freedom of movement of UNRWA personnel in the occupied Palestinian territory. The restrictions included closures of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and prohibiting local staff from travelling in United Nations vehicles across the Erez crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip and Allenby Bridge, or from driving in Israel and East Jerusalem.

Cumbersome procedures for obtaining permits for local staff to enter Israel and East Jerusalem were also imposed. On many occasions, permits were not granted even though the procedures were followed.

The Israeli authorities maintained that restrictions were necessary to protect Israel against terrorism. In the West Bank, coordination with the Israeli military liaison officers continued, including 72 meetings. However, these officers had limited or no influence over Israeli checkpoints staffed by private contractors and staff movement became more restricted and unpredictable at several checkpoints, notably those controlling access to East Jerusalem or through the West Bank barrier.

In the Gaza Strip, the movement of staff was severely restricted until 19 January 2009 during the conflict that began on 27 December 2008 and UNRWA was able to provide emergency services only during that period. In March, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced a requirement that Gaza-based international staff had to enter Israel to apply for Israeli visa renewals. Local staff required permits from the Israeli authorities to cross Erez. The Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza remained closed for public use throughout 2009, but, for a total of 198 days, it was open on an exceptional basis and with prior coordination.

During the reporting period, no significant movement restrictions were imposed on UNRWA staff by the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, or by the Palestinian Authority.

At the end of 2009, 16 staff members were in detention, 10 of whom were held by the Israeli authorities, two by the Palestinian authorities, two by the authorities of Lebanon, and two by Syria. Despite repeated requests made by the Agency in accordance with General Assembly resolution 36/232, the Israeli authorities did not provide the Agency with access to its detained staff but had provided some information on the reasons for detention.

Agency services and premises - the normal route for the Agency's humanitarian shipments into the Gaza Strip would be through the Karni crossing, except for construction materials, which would enter through the Sofa crossing. The Israeli authorities continued to impose transit charges on shipments entering the Gaza Strip, forcing UNRWA to pay \$307,649 in 2009. In the Agency's view, the charge is a direct tax, from which it ought to be exempt under the 1946 Convention. The import into the Gaza Strip of construction materials was almost entirely prohibited, one exception being some materials required to construct temporary facilities for its Summer Games. As a consequence of the prohibition, UNRWA projects worth \$76 million were still pending at the end of the reporting period. The Operations Support Officer programme continued in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and was established in Lebanon in September. The programme played an invaluable role in United Nations neutrality. The 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations provides that "the premises of the United Nations shall be inviolable". Contrary to that legal obligation, the Israeli military forcibly entered UNRWA premises in the West Bank on eight occasions. On 15 January the Agency's main warehouse and its contents were destroyed after shelling of the Gaza Field Office compound with white phosphorous munitions, starting a fire. These strikes and shelling during the conflict killed 6 civilians and injured 23 civilians sheltering in UNRWA installations or attending an UNRWA health centre, and injured 11 Agency personnel.

On 11 February 2009, the Secretary-General convened a United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry into certain incidents in the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 19 January 2009. Seven of those incidents related to UNRWA. In its report, the Board concluded that, in all but one instance involving UNRWA premises or operations, Israel had breached the inviolability of United Nations premises and/or failed to respect the immunity of the Agency's property and assets from interference.

It noted that such inviolability and immunity could not be overridden by demands of military expediency, and found Israel responsible for the deaths, injuries and property damage caused by its actions. The Board could not establish responsibility for the other incident related to UNRWA. Following the Board's report, the United Nations engaged an independent loss adjuster to value the losses suffered by the United Nations in respect of those incidents, for which the Board had found responsibility.

In July, the United Nations submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel a claim for reimbursement for the losses that the United Nations had sustained in a number of incidents, including the above incidents relating to UNRWA. In January 2010, Israel made a payment of \$10.5 million to the United Nations, of which the United Nations remitted \$10.27 million to the Agency.

In the West Bank, Palestinian Authority security forces entered UNRWA premises on four occasions. Separately, a Palestinian physically assaulted a staff member inside an UNRWA installation in Jenin. In the Gaza Strip, armed Palestinian militants forcibly entered UNRWA installations on five occasions, shooting and injuring an UNRWA guard on one occasion. On three occasions, bullets or other munitions fired from nearby Palestinian military training grounds caused minor damage to UNRWA installations.

Other matters during 2009: UNRWA was reimbursed by the Palestinian Authority the sum of \$2,290,266 for value-added tax. On 31 December 2009, the total amount of value added tax still due to the Agency from the Palestinian Authority was approximately \$30.3 million. The Palestinian Authority has continued to acknowledge its obligation to reimburse value-added tax to the Agency.

According to the report, the legal status of Palestine refugees in the Agency's area of operations remained substantially the same as that described in last year's annual report.

The report also discusses field priorities in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Gaza strip. In Jordan, the Field Office focused on three main priorities: maintaining an acceptable quality of core services; intensifying efforts to help refugees take advantage of socio-economic opportunities; and enhancing assistance to the most vulnerable refugee groups, such as the abject poor and the ex-Gazans, who do not enjoy the same rights as other refugees and are not considered Jordanian nationals.

The Lebanon Field Office focused on securing improvements in the quality of health care. The focus for 2010 will be on pursuing similar reforms to improve education, engineering and relief services. Other priorities included: decentralizing management and empowering staff; reviewing recruitment and contracting processes; improving internal and external communication; and strengthening engagement with the Lebanese authorities on the refugees' right to work and on extending services to Palestinians.

In Syria, the Agency began implementation of an initiative to address youth unemployment, following the outcome of a needs assessment exercise in 2009 and consultations with the refugee community.

In Gaza, field priorities included consolidating the achievements made in recent years to improve learning outcomes in maths and Arabic; providing enhanced human rights education and practical help to pupils with special needs; maintaining an initiative to promote respect and discipline in UNRWA schools; sustaining the Summer Games activities for 252,000 children; improving socio-economic opportunities for women; increasing assistance to the very poorest refugees; and ensuring better community participation within the health programme.

The West Bank Field Office focused on an education recovery plan entailing improvements in curricula, teaching and remedial education, as well as school management, community participation and child well-being. Other priorities included maintaining the standards of its primary health-care system in the face of increasing demand; social safety net assistance, and the monitoring and reporting of rights and international humanitarian law violations.

Also before the Committee is the report of the Secretary-General on Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities (document A/65/283), which refers to correspondence between the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representative of Israel regarding actions taken by the Government of Israel in implementing the relevant provisions of resolution 63/92, entitled "Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities".

The Committee also had before it a report of the Secretary-General on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues (document A/65/311), which refers to correspondence between the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations regarding actions taken by the Government of Israel in implementing the relevant provisions of the resolution. It also presents the information made available by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA to the Secretary-General on the return of refugees registered with the Agency to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

The Committee also had before it the report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, covering the period from 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 (document A/65/225), transmitted via a note of the Secretary-General.

Statement by Commissioner-General

FILIPPO GRANDI, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), highlighted the main challenges that his Agency continued to confront in 2010, as its management and staff remained focused on seeking even more effective ways to promote the well-being of Palestine refugees and to advocate their rights under United Nations resolutions and international law. UNRWA's mission remained of critical importance to refugees, to the Middle East, and to the international community. It was regrettable that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and refugee question remained unresolved. On the other hand, 61 years after the Agency's establishment, the vital contributions of its work remained undiminished by the passage of time.

He pointed to a number of developments dominating attention over the course of the year, especially the renewal, in recent months, of the search for peace. Notwithstanding considerable complexities, political actors had to make courageous choices. The international community could not afford to relent in pursuit of a peaceful resolution, a viable State of Palestine; an end to occupation; and, most relevant, a lasting solution to the plight of the refugees. UNRWA was not a political actor, and he spoke from the perspective of an organization that served people caught in conflict for six decades. Peace was owed to those people. On specific challenges, he said he continued to deal with the aftermath of destruction and human suffering by the recent war in Gaza, but welcomed the positive measures by Israel to improve access for a variety of consumer goods and construction materials. However, the situation of the civilian population remained difficult. Rehabilitation and construction requirements were enormous. In October, only 24 per cent of the scheduled imports for improved UNRWA projects were granted entry. Crucial materials were subjected to severe restrictions, cumbersome import procedures and frequent delays. There had been little progress in economic recovery. The United Nations, including UNRWA, recognized Israel's legitimate security needs, however, he joined the Secretary-General and international actors in urging an increase in the range of imports into Gaza. The root causes of the blockade must be addressed; without fully opening the borders for people and goods, dependency would remain abnormally high for a population with skills and entrepreneurial spirit.

In the West Bank, there were welcome signs of economic recovery that were driven by growth in the main urban areas, he said. However, improved macroeconomic indicators had yet to transform the living standard for refugees. Many Palestinians, refugees and non-refugees, continued to endure the harsh effects of the regime of fragmentation and closures that were becoming permanent. He called attention to the refugees of East Jerusalem, 70,000 strong, who were exposed to risk of housing demolitions and forced evictions. In a few weeks, UNRWA would join the rest of the United Nations family in appealing for emergency humanitarian assistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territory through a consolidated funding appeal. It was a sad reflection of the lack of progress

on the political front that UNRWA was compelled to do so for the ninth time since 2000. Resources spent on food aid, cash grants and emergency jobs should be used to promote the institutional, human and economic development of Palestinians. However, the current circumstances required that the Agency not lower its collective humanitarian guard, or stop addressing the special needs of those affected by conflict. He also noted the lack of political progress, saying it was sad that, for the ninth time since the year 2000, UNRWA had been compelled to do so.

In Lebanon, he said UNRWA was greatly encouraged by the courageous decision last August to amend labour laws and grant Palestinians access to formal employment in the private sector. That was an important first step, which would help refugees lift themselves out of poverty. He noted other steps, including the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared Camps, and UNRWA's work with Lebanese civilian and military institutions to expedite rebuilding. In Jordan and Syria, the situation was stable and conducive to a focus on human development programming.

Financial challenges were common to all fields of operation, he said, stressing that UNRWA's core budget was a grave issue. As of August there was an \$85 million shortfall, against a \$541.5 million operational budget. In recent weeks, however, he had been informed of exceptional additional contributions by the three largest donors, the European Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom, which narrowed the gap to \$50 million. With some additional resources expected, he hoped that the gap would be fully bridged. The Agency was doing its part to address its financial difficulties: he had revised the strategy for resource mobilization and had undertaken an enhanced fundraising campaign, which included an extension of appeals to Member States in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and redoubling of efforts to partners in the Arab world. The Organizational Development Initiative laid the foundations for the introduction of modern management systems and vital improvements in the quality of services. Other reforms, under the headline of "Sustaining Change," concentrated on enhancing service delivery to refugees and improving the approach to resource mobilization and strategic partnerships.

He expressed the Agency's commitment to sustaining the achievements built up over six decades. UNRWA's core goal was to help refugees realize their potential, despite the protracted exile. He wanted schools to be an expression of the Agency's instinct for developing potential. He noted UNRWA's work could only speak to a portion of refugee concerns. He invited the international community to recognize refugees as a constituency for peace. He expressed gratitude to the States whose financial contributions sustained work with refugees, and thanked UNRWA staff, calling them "unsung heroes". The future of Palestinian refugees for a just solution was a political issue to which parties to the conflict and the international community were responsible, and they expected more than "lip service". Until there was peace, UNRWA continued to require active support.

Interactive Discussion

Opening the interactive discussion, the representative of Morocco said that a total of \$4.5 billion had been promised for the Palestinian refugees, and he asked what the level of commitment was for those donors.

Also participating was the representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, who expressed thanks for UNRWA's reports and for the services provided by the Agency. He said the Palestinian people lived and experienced UNRWA on a daily basis, and went through the pain of the challenges that the Agency went through. The refugees of the destroyed camp at Nahr al-Bared should be able to go back to their regular lives. UNRWA had been providing for the refugees for more than 60 years, and was operating on a temporary basis until a just solution was achieved on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 of 1948.

In recent months, he said, much information had been released from Israel, the occupying Power, about loosening the blockade against the people in Gaza. Yet, only 24 per cent of the approved products were allowed to enter the Gaza Strip. It would be helpful for the Committee to reflect upon that issue within the next three days. He appealed to all donor countries to come up with the additional \$30 million needed for UNRWA to be able to function without constant fear of insufficient operating funds. He supported the position of the Secretary-General and UNRWA's Commissioner-General on the need increase funding to UNRWA and to add more international employees to the Agency.

He asked Mr. Grandi if he could share more of his thinking about how Member States could strategically contribute to ending the recurring financial problems experienced by the Agency. He also asked if Mr. Grandi if he had had any more ideas to share about the main strategies for dealing collectively with minimizing the cycle of financial problems, as those would be beneficial for the Committee to consider in its deliberations in the next few days.

Responding to questions about resource mobilization, Mr. Grandi said UNRWA would present the main elements of the plan in the context of the new phase of reform. That would be part and parcel with a part of larger reform, which would be discussed with the closest stakeholders.

He further noted that, first, UNRWA had to become better at explaining how its core budget was allocated. Some partners thought the core budget was a black administrative hole, when in actuality, the core budget allowed UNRWA to run very important education programmes, which were investments in the future.

Depriving the Agency of its core budget made it difficult to provide education and its infrastructure. UNRWA must also become better at seizing all fundraising opportunities, which meant a need for greater investment in fundraising capacity. So far, the Agency was operating on a shoestring budget, and given the demands of donors, there needed to be greater investment in more capacity to fundraise.

Continuing, he acknowledged that the donor base must be enlarged and diversified, along with the Agency's fund and core budget. About six weeks ago, he had met with the Arab League Foreign Ministers in Cairo, during which he clarified funding issues. He appreciated their donor support and their important contribution to emergency activities, but he sought their greater participation in donor activities for UNRWA's core fund. Also important was to develop partnerships with non-State actors, such as foundations. At the World Economic Forum in Marrakesh, he had met "active" players in the Middle East region. Lastly, it was vital to be extremely cost effective in programme implementation, for which oversight and monitoring should be strengthened.

As for pledges made in Sharm El-Sheikh, he noted that they had been made for the reconstruction of Gaza, and not for Palestinians or UNRWA in general. He did not know the financial status of those pledges, but he imagined they could not be utilized, as reconstruction was slow in Gaza. To a further question about reconstruction and the passage of building materials, he said that there had been improvement since June and there were consumer goods available to those who could afford them. Building materials were still subjected to restrictions, and they were subjected to a laborious process. The key was to make those transactions quick and transparent, and the goal would be to ensure that the capacity of the two crossings was beefed up, so building materials could pass through.

Despite improvements, however, the reconstruction needs were so big, that it was taking too long; the infrastructure was crumbling, and there were problems with schools, water systems and other aspects of rebuilding, he said.

To a point raised about the United Nations budget, he said he sought support for UNRWA's management-related functions, in line with the rest of the United Nations, in areas such as security and internal justice for staff. There was insufficient overhead, and he appealed to the United Nations for help.

When the discussion continued, the representative of Zimbabwe echoed the sentiments of the Palestinian representative, regarding the need to ensure funding for the Agency. He added that the United Nations General Assembly should increase the budget for UNRWA.

The representative of Egypt asked about the UNRWA facilities that had been destroyed during the Gaza war, and about the obstacles being encountered regarding the schools, the level of the schools, and their curriculums.

The representative of Lebanon said that the issue of the refugees was humanitarian and political, and the goal should be their right of return to their home. He was not happy with some statements made lately, which expressed political opinions with regard to the right of return. Regarding the blockade, he noted that it was in violation of article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and also was in violation of the right of UNRWA staff to move goods. It was not clear why the blockade persisted. The Israelis said it was to prevent weapons from entering Gaza, but he wondered why jam and candy were prohibited. That was a means to subjugate the Palestinians. He acknowledged the shortfalls in funds, but highlighted that UNRWA was still paying taxes to the Israeli authorities when goods came in, which violated existing agreements. There was also a high cost of delays. He supported the request that was made to make use of assessed contributions to support UNRWA. On a quick note, he thanked the Commissioner-General for acknowledging a softening of the labour laws in Lebanon.

The representative of Australia asked if Mr. Grandi could expand on the lack of compensation for UNRWA's staff in the face of life-threatening risks and speak more about the difficulties with regard to education for refugee children.

Responding, Mr. Grandi said that several questions had referred to the reconstruction of facilities in Gaza, which was part of the reconstruction plan undertaken by the Agency, for schools, health centres, and a large number of private homes. The United Nations plan, valued at approximately \$250 million had been the basis for the gradual negotiation of the reconstruction projects. The reconstruction plan did not include only facilities that had been damaged or destroyed, but those that needed repair.

Regarding schools, he said that UNRWA had a school-age population in its Gaza schools of more than 200,000 children. That number increased by 8,000 every year, owing to population growth, and the Agency could not accommodate that growth. The need was as high as 100 new schools. At the current pace, it would take too long. What prevented the acceleration of production was the slow pace of the importation of materials. Regarding training, there was a shortfall of funds for training of teachers and other positions. Together, the combined elements made the situation very difficult. What was required was the lifting of the blockade. On another question, he made clear that UNRWA had no mandate to develop solutions pertaining to the political sphere. He said the Agency distanced itself from a "very inappropriate" statement made by a staff member. He reiterated that it did not reflect the position of the Agency and was made out of context, as it was not UNRWA's responsibility to make statements of that nature.

To questions concerning funding, he said the Agency's working capital had been depleted over the years. It had been \$60 million in 2005, but it would be down to

zero if the Agency closed the year at an even pace. The working capital must be reconstituted because it was a safety valve for UNRWA. If the Agency had to start the year with no working capital, it would have trouble paying the salaries of teachers, doctors, social workers and other staff. With regard to conflict or hazard pay, the United Nations paid a hazard allowance to its staff working in risky situations of conflict. Because of the large area covered by UNRWA, it was impossible to afford to pay that allowance on a regular basis.

The representative of Libya asked about the remuneration of UNRWA officials, and how Member States could help to ensure protection of that compensation. He asked why the Agency did not allow its officials to enjoy international status. With regard to cargoes that States were attempting to send to Gaza, he asked if there was cooperation between UNRWA and the occupying Authorities to allow the cargo through at the crossing points into Gaza.

Mr. Grandi said that UNRWA, like other United Nations organizations, had international staff, whose wages and remuneration, privileges and immunities, were in line with all other United Nations staff worldwide. However, UNRWA had only 133 international posts. That was very little, like a department in New York. That core staff was surrounded by "area staff" – doctors, nurses, and teachers – a category particular to UNRWA, and their remuneration was governed by a policy based on host country comparables. Area staff was United Nations staff, however, and should enjoy the privileges and immunities of United Nations staff members everywhere. On cargo from boats, UNRWA imported materials only through legal means; it was a United Nations organization, and that was how the Agency operated. In one instance, when the cargo of one of the boats was offloaded at a port, the Agency had been requested to participate with other United Nations agencies in the logistical handling of the cargo, and had made itself available for that purpose.

Statements

FEDA ABDELHADI-NASSER, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, reaffirming Palestine's abiding gratitude to UNRWA's staff, said that the Agency had been a constant in the lives of the Palestine refugees for more than six decades. She also expressed gratitude to Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, countries that had hosted refugees and assisted the Agency since its beginning. She further reiterated gratitude to the international community as a whole for its support of UNRWA. She urged the continued support of the Agency, particularly regarding financial needs, saying such support was necessary to avert further austerity measures and a deterioration of services, which would call into question the international community's stance at the present critical juncture. Reflecting on the hardships that the Palestine refugees continued to endure, she said it was a tragedy and a grave injustice that, more than 60 years since "Al-Nakba" in 1948, the refugees and their descendants continued to live as an uprooted, dispossessed and exiled people. Those refugees, at 4.8 million people, constituted the largest and most protracted refugee problem in the world. It was imperative to reaffirm fundamental principles and positions, such as the Palestine refugees' right to return to their homes; the rejection of Israel's constant rhetoric and provocative stance denying the rights of the Palestine refugees as well as any responsibility for their plight; and the right of the Palestinians displaced in the June 1967 hostilities to return to their homes and lands. She said the situation of the Palestine refugees remained precarious, with poverty, hardship and instability afflicting hundreds of thousands of refugee families. The situation in the Gaza Strip had also remained most critical, owing to the continuing impact of Israel's merciless blockade. The severe consequences of last year's Israeli military aggression still gravely affected every aspect of life in Gaza. Israel, the occupying Power, inflicted trauma, terror and destruction on the Palestinian civilian population, which included children and women, hundreds of whom had been killed and injured. Israel's continued obstruction of Gaza's recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction was detrimentally and, perhaps, irrevocably harming the well-being and stability of the society as a whole, particularly the most vulnerable.

The Israeli military aggression had caused damage or destruction to at least 60,000 homes, of which 46,500 were refugee shelters, she said. It was deplorable that the Gaza population continued to be forced to live amid rubble — reminded daily of the brutal onslaught and blockade. At the same time, that abhorrent situation engendered solidarity for the Palestinian people in Gaza from around the world, including among those civilians that had been aboard the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" in May, attempting to deliver much-needed humanitarian aid. She reiterated the condemnation of Israel's military attack on the flotilla, in violation of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, which had resulted in the killing of nine Turkish nationals. She called for accountability for that crime perpetrated against civilians in international waters.

Highlighting UNRWA's report, she said that 76.7 per cent of families in the Gaza Strip had been found to suffer from food insecurity; unemployment remained high, damaged health and sanitation networks posed major environmental and health risks, and Gaza's educational system remained severely overburdened. Nearly 90 per cent of the water was unsafe to drink, and up to 80 million litres of raw sewage were being dumped daily into the sea. She reiterated the unequivocal call for the full lifting of the illegal Israeli blockade and for the movement restrictions on persons and goods necessary for the genuine commencement of reconstruction in Gaza, including of suspended United Nations projects, such as the repair of refugee shelters, infrastructure and Agency facilities, and the building of new schools. The international community should not relent in demanding that.

She also called attention to the ongoing impairment of refugee access to UNRWA services in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, owing to the construction of the discriminatory, Israeli-only road network. In the past year in East Jerusalem alone, the demolition of 80 homes had led to the displacement of 300 people, including 149 children. In that regard, she agreed with UNRWA's sombre assessment that the trauma of ongoing dispossession and repeated displacement of refugees since 1948 could not be overemphasized.

The deplorable situation must be rectified, in line with calls made repeatedly by the General Assembly in relevant resolutions, she said. She also acknowledged the firm position of the international community on the issue, as well as the constructive role played by the Operations Support Officers in that regard. She reiterated the need for respect of UNRWA's immunity and for ensuring the safety and security of its staff and facilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. She recalled the affirmations made last year by the Secretary-General's Board of Inquiry, following Israel's attacks on numerous UNRWA facilities regarding the inviolability of United Nations premises. That could not be overridden by the demands of military expediency; United Nations personnel and all civilians within United Nations premises, as well as civilians in the immediate vicinity of those premises and elsewhere, were to be protected in accordance with the rules and principles of international humanitarian law.

She stressed that Israel, the occupying Power, must be compelled to abide by its legal obligations, including under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the 1946 Convention. Member States should be called on to provide emergency funding to remedy the negative and costly repercussions of Israel's illegal practices on the refugees and UNRWA.

The tampering and damage to the Summer Games facilities were deplorable, she said, reaffirming support for the spirit of that initiative. Such programmes could make all the difference in the life of a traumatized and deprived child, giving hope for the possibilities of a life free from the want, misery and conflict imposed on them and their families. She commended the Agency's "Engaging Youth" initiative, launched this year in Syria, noting the timeliness of the project during the International Year of Youth. She further welcomed the Agency's reconstruction of the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in northern Lebanon and ongoing efforts to provide emergency assistance to the refugees still suffering from the crisis there.

She again urged the international community to intensify efforts to promote the resumption of an accelerated peace process and the achievement of a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including an end to the Israeli occupation since 1967, the achievement of the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees on the basis of resolution 194.

SOHA GENDI (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that until the inalienable rights of the Palestine refugees were fully realized, the role of the Agency was essential to the lives of more than 4.8 million Palestine refugees. She expressed concern regarding Israel's actions, which denied basic rights to Palestine refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and for its systematic violations of international humanitarian law, human rights law and relevant United Nations resolutions. She also noted Israel's practices of obstructing UNRWA's personnel from fulfilling their duties.

She said that the living conditions of Palestine refugees were also of grave concern, particularly of those living in Gaza, where the continued blockade had caused casualties, death and widespread damage and destruction of the Palestinian civilian infrastructure and United Nations facilities. The ban of construction materials into Gaza had halted practically all reconstruction projects, among them medical centres, and schools, and the complete halt of reconstruction and building of new UNRWA schools, which impacted Palestinian children's right to education. Israel had a legal obligation under the Fourth Geneva Convention to open its crossing points with Gaza so that reconstruction and building of UNRWA schools could progress. The extensive damage to the Agency's facilities by the Israeli military assault on Gaza was a breach of the inviolability of United Nations premises and the immunity of the Organization from any form of interference. She called for Israel to end its illegal blockade in full compliance with the terms and provisions of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and other relevant United Nations resolutions. She stressed that UNRWA's financial situation required greater attention from the donor community and international financial institutions. Increased contributions would ease the ongoing financial shortfalls, which were exacerbated by the situation on the ground. The Movement stood ready to foresee other options to deal with the "very serious" problem of UNRWA's under-funded budget. It also supported the request by UNRWA to increase its staff to allow it to "undertake fully its responsibilities and to respond immediately to increasing challenges on the ground".

JAN GRAULS (Belgium), on behalf of the European Union, said that UNRWA had been the leading force to help improve the living conditions of more than 4.7 million Palestine refugees. The Agency's steadfast commitment should be saluted. He expressed the Union's full support for the extension of UNRWA's mandate, and commended the efforts of UNRWA's Commissioner-General, Mr. Grandi. He noted with concern the vulnerable situation of children and appreciated the importance of UNRWA's activities in education. However urgent measures were needed to address the fact that more than 39,000 children in Gaza were being denied access to a United Nations education. The situation on the ground was hampering humanitarian operators from providing essential services to the Palestine refugee situation. The Union welcomed Israeli steps to ease entry of goods into Gaza, but reiterated calls for a full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) for the immediate opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from

Gaza. Limitations to the freedom of movement of UNRWA staff impeded the Agency's ability to fulfil its tasks.

He said that the European Union was troubled by instances of threats and attacks against UNRWA facilities and staff. The Union and its Member States were UNRWA's largest donor, and in 2009, the Union provided 175 million euros to the Agency's regular budget. In addition, it had contributed to special programmes and emergency appeals. Nonetheless, there was an alarming financial situation, which brought austere measures that would not doubt affect the quality of the services provided to the refugees. There was a need for predictable funding, and the Union strongly urged new donors to commit financially to the work of UNRWA and for existing donors to increase contributions. The reform process, on which UNRWA had embarked, as reflected in its medium-term strategy (2010-2015), would undoubtedly improve the quality of services it provided.

In closing, he called for all parties to seek earnestly, a way to keep peace negotiations active and moving, which should lead to a two-State solution with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side-by-side in peace.

TALAT RADWAN (Saudi Arabia) expressed sincere gratitude to all UNRWA staff for their sacrifices and efforts amid the risks, and he urged their continuation.

The continued implementation of programmes, however, required an increase in employees and offices in the occupied territories. The expansion of health centres, schools and other infrastructure was necessary to cope with the refugee population growth. In order to achieve those goals, the international community and others, such as the specialized financial institutions like the World Bank, should double their contributions.

He said his country condemned the continuous siege on the Gaza Strip and demanded the immediate cessation of that "unjust blockade and all arbitrary actions and restrictions imposed by Israel on all international relief organizations". He also called for the demolition of the "racist" separating wall, which Israel built in the West Bank. The wall had been deemed illegitimate, not only according to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, but also by several General Assembly resolutions that affirmed its illegality.

Saudi Arabia attached great importance to promoting humanitarian issues at the grassroots and governmental levels, he said. That had been confirmed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which had reported that Saudi Arabia topped the world in the field of voluntary contributions to humanitarian relief operations in 2008. In addition, the Kingdom had supported the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA's budgets from 2002 to 2009, with contributions of \$734.8 million. In addition, \$200 million had been allocated for projects under study with the Al-Aqsa Fund. Middle East peace was one of the biggest problems threatening international peace, and Israeli colonization of the occupied territories was one of the few such remaining situations since the end of colonization and the reversal of apartheid. Financial support was not the sole solution that problem, which required political support and direct negotiations between the Israeli Government and Palestinian Authority.

TINE MØRCH SMITH (Norway) said that, in light of the recurring budget deficits, structural changes in the Agency were needed in three ways: how it was funded; how it operated; and how it cooperated with other stakeholders and partners. In terms of funding, an immediate step would be to find a more balanced burden-sharing within the Agency's Advisory Commission. Today, 90 per cent of its general fund was covered by contributions from the top 10 Commission members. Recalling that membership in the Commission came with a commitment to support the Agency financially, Norway encouraged members to take a closer look at financial statistics and increase their contributions. Noting nonetheless that the long-term solution to the financial situation did not lay with the Commission, the representative stated that the Agency's donor base must also be enhanced.

A change to the Agency's operation was also needed, she said. In the process of "organizational development" the focus should be on the sustainability of change. Thus, while improving the quality of the Agency's programmes, especially in education, health and relief to the poor, efforts were needed to ensure that costs were cut and that the Agency was streamlined. Additionally, a reassessment of the Agency's cooperation with its stakeholders and partners would be an important first step towards looking for synergies among United Nations agencies and humanitarian and development partners. Recalling finally the "staggering" international effort involved in laying the foundation for enduring peace in the Middle East, she said that donors had the responsibility to ensure that those collective efforts and contributions were spent in the most efficient way possible. It made no sense if some organizations were overfunded, while others, equally important to achieving the goal, remained "chronically under-funded."

Stating finally that the Agency's contribution towards the common goal of peace was a cornerstone of the total activity directed towards the Palestinian people, Norway advocated for a "more integrated approach" to the Agency's overall work. Donor funds existed to alleviate the Agency's financial woes, she asserted, adding that it was "just a matter of finding the right priorities".

David Windsor (Australia) said that Australia, as a longstanding strong supporter of the Relief and Works Agency, welcomed UNRWA's continued emphasis on fiscal responsibility and organizational reform, as well as efforts to further expand its donor base. Australia recognized the often substantial in-kind contributions made by the host countries — Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Australia had been a longstanding strong supporter of UNRWA, providing more than \$88 million since 2001. Some specific projects to which it had been contributing included a programme of improved water and sanitation facilities in schools and the provision of emergency and humanitarian assistance through short-term employment for up to 54,000 refugees. Australia would increase its core funding for the Agency this Australian financial year (2010-2011), and would move into a multi-year agreement with the Agency. Those steps reflected his country's strong commitment to the Agency's work and should provide greater predictability in its funding.

He said Australia had been a consistent supporter of a two-State solution, where both Palestinians and Israelis lived "side by side in their own States". The delegation strongly welcomed the decision by the parties to re-launch direct peace negotiations, and while it was "very disappointed" with what had happened since that time, specifically, Israel's decision not to extend its moratorium on settlement activity, it urged both parties to resume direct talks and to refrain from all actions that undermined trust or the climate for negotiations and urged a freeze of all settlement activity by Israel.

Australia had significantly increased its assistance to the Palestinian people, he said, adding that the country was contributing to the development of Palestinian institutions and building capacity in preparation for statehood, as well as providing humanitarian assistance. It had welcomed Israel's easing of access for goods entering Gaza and continued to urge Israel to do all it could to increase that flow. The situation there "remains of great concern to us". It was very disappointing to hear of the ongoing problems the Agency was facing in reopening a number of its schools. Australia condemned the cowardly and shameful attacks by armed men against the UNRWA summer camps and the acts of vandalism. It also condemned all actions that endangered lives in Israel.

He said that fundamental improvements to the day-to-day life and prospects of Palestinian refugees across the region would only be addressed by a peace in the Middle East based on a two-State solution. Australia reiterated its call on all parties to invest — now — in further efforts to bring about that lasting peace in the region. He reiterated his country's commitment to the Agency and its "valuable work".

PHAM VINH QUANG (Viet Nam) commended UNRWA for the "tremendous efforts" in delivering programmes to millions of Palestinian refugees, as well as the reform of its recruitment practices and new contractual modality for improving its service. He encouraged the Agency to continue reform in the areas of budget and financial management, but he also expressed concern that funding shortfalls would affect the Agency's operation at this critical juncture. He urged the international community to reaffirm its commitment to the Palestinian people, recalling that Viet Nam had contributed \$200,000 to the flash appeal for Gaza in 2009. He was also concerned that the blockade, entering its fourth year, had impacted the lives of 1.5 million people, half of them children. Actions by Israeli authorities on the West Bank and Gaza, including the separation barrier and restrictions on movement, among others, were additional hardships for the Palestinian population and impeding the Agency's mandate.

He called on Israel to cease all military activities, end its blockade and provide protection to the Palestinian people, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The Agency's staff, as well, needed convenient and safe conditions to carry out its difficult work. Further, it needed assurance of the privileges and immunities afforded United Nations personnel, so work was not impeded. Concluding, he stressed that the Road Map, the Arab Peace initiative, and relevant Security Council resolutions, among others, remained the best possible framework for establishing peace and a two-State solution. That peace would only be achieved through the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

AMINE CHABI (Morocco), noting the stalemate in the peace process, said that UNRWA was playing a role in providing some stability in the region. Regarding the lack of education for refugees, thousands could not attend school and there were no new schools. More than 60 years after UNRWA had been set up, the situation had not improved; in fact, it had worsened. It was difficult for the people — there was no commerce and no drinking water, among other problems, and the people were getting poorer and poorer. The blockades made life worse, and 80 per cent of the people needed food aid on a daily basis. There was also no health care. There was a huge need to meet the expectations of the people there. The blockade was unjustified and unjustifiable. In short, that unprecedented humanitarian disaster required a close look at UNRWA's needs.

He said that unemployment in 2009 in the Gaza Strip had been at 43 per cent. Half the imports to Gaza were basic foods, and even those were strictly controlled at the crossing points. The situation had a devastating impact on the region, so all donors should continue efforts to strengthen UNRWA's budget. In East Jerusalem, the situation, which included housing seizures, was alarming. The Palestinians suffered enormously and the international community was rightly concerned. At the African meeting on Palestine in Rabat, the matter of the status of Jerusalem had been a priority. There could be no lasting peace without justice, yet there were new obstacles to direct talks. Despite those, UNRWA had considered in its fantastic work.

IHAB HAMED (Syria) said there were more than 5 million refugees as a result of Israeli expansionist policies, including the killing of women and children, and policies of collective punishment. It had been more than six decades since resolution 194, which had recognized the right of Palestinians to return to their lands and properties. Israel invited stray settlers to take away the houses of the Palestinians, in violation of human rights. The report of UNRWA's Commissioner-General had provided a description of the tragedies. He noted the blockade of human and construction supplies, which delayed vital programmes affecting the life of the people of Gaza and leading to their suffering. Ninety per cent water of water was unsafe; 95 per cent of private-sector enterprise had closed.

He noted that the Israeli army had attacked the aid flotilla, even though it had been trying to deliver educational materials and medicines. That had led to the death of nine peace activists and ran counter to international law. Military operations had devastating effects, and Israeli authorities continued their destruction of UNRWA buildings, which ran counter to United Nations immunity. Immunity and privileges could not be overruled because of the military.

Palestinian refugees needed Syria, he said, adding that his country hosted more than half a million refugees as "dear brothers" and provided support to UNRWA to carry out its mandate. The issue of the Palestinian refugees was a moral one, and thus, UNRWA needed more funds and more donors. Its financial situation was critical because, with the \$103 million budgetary shortfall. The Israelis provocative actions against the Palestinians, peace activists and UNRWA left no doubt that the international community needed to compel Israel to comply with relevant United Nations resolutions.

ABUZIED SHAWSELDIMAHMED MOHAMED ([Sudan](#)) said 60 years since UNRWA's establishment and there was no humanitarian cause more deserving of international interest than the cause of the Palestinian refugees. Thus, he voiced gratitude for UNRWA, for its praiseworthy work to foster human development, in the Gaza Strip, and in the West Bank, in education and social services, and in providing emergency relief, micro-enterprise, and housing. When speaking of the suffering of Palestinian people, one must not hide the cause of it, namely, the Israeli occupation and occupying practices. The Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territory, the creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the resolution of the cause of the Palestinian refugees, could ensure that their return to their territories and bring peace to the Middle East.

He said that the world remembered the crimes perpetrated by the Israeli occupying forces in Palestine; that war had caused suffering to many Palestinians in what could be described as collective punishment restricting freedom of movement and impeding the entry of consumer goods. The Palestinian suffering had only increased, with more than 60 per cent now living below the poverty threshold. Infrastructure had been destroyed, including schools, and public services had ground down. Israeli settlements meanwhile had been expanded and new obstacles had been put in the path of the Palestinian people, particularly the refugees, preventing them from living a dignified life. Some basic services could not be provided by the relief office.

He, therefore, called on the international community to provide resources to enable UNRWA to carry out its work. He also called on it to compel respect for international humanitarian law and to facilitate the return of Palestinian civilians in the Occupied Territory to their homes. His delegation meanwhile welcomed the praiseworthy efforts by "brother" countries hosting Palestinian refugees within their borders. He also thanked UNRWA donor countries for helping to mitigate the suffering of the Palestinian refugees and ensuring their enjoyment of their humanitarian rights. He called on donor countries to increase their contributions.

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