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FOURTH COMMITTEE BEGINS DISCUSSION OF UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AGENCY

FOR PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

Surveys Show 87 Per Cent of Gaza, 56 Per Cent Of West Bank Residents Live Below Poverty Line

The Occupied Palestinian Territory "had become a byword for violations of international law and the hardship and deprivation of the Palestine refugee experience", the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) heard today as it began its general debate on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Karen Koning Abuzayd, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, said reports indicated that between July and the end of September, Gaza had sustained 5,300 artillery shells and more than 292 air strikes. In the same period, 298 Palestinians had been killed in Gaza, 49 of them children. Two Israelis had been killed and 28 injured from 424 home-made rockets fired into Israel.

Further, recent surveys showed that nearly 87 per cent of Gaza and 56 per cent of West Bank residents lived below the official poverty line and were unable to support themselves without assistance, she stated. In the West Bank, commerce had been reduced to a trickle by the barrier around Jerusalem, the tri-sectioning of the West Bank and a draconian permit regime. Travel to and from Jerusalem was impossible for most Palestinians. The separation barrier in the West Bank was a concern and the impact seemed to be fading from international attention.

She said UNRWA had discharged its duty through education, health, social welfare, microcredit and shelter services in five fields of operation: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. The Agency's ability to deliver assistance effectively in times of crisis had most recently been seen in Lebanon where UNRWA's 2,800 staff had maintained health and relief services throughout the conflict, delivering food and other assistance to those unable to reach distribution centres. In total, about 20,000 displaced persons had taken shelter either inside refugee camps or within UNRWA facilities.

In the ensuing debate, the representative of Israel wanted to clarify whether the Committee was discussing 2005 or 2006. Most of the Commissioner-General's briefing had related to 2006, particularly since the abduction of an Israeli soldier outside of Gaza in July, and other events inside Israel near the Lebanese border. The Committee wanted to open the debate and include events shaping the Middle East over the past year, it was important to include the Syrian assassination of Prime Minister Hariri and Iranian support of Hizbollah. According to UNRWA's mandate, the Agency was tasked with helping refugees; however, parts of the briefing had related to issues including the prospect for Palestinian statehood and Jewish settlements in the territories.

The Permanent Observer of Palestine said the report was a sobering reminder of the continuing difficulties for Palestinian refugees and of the crucial need for the assistance provided by UNRWA. The Agency's efforts had been vital in alleviating the suffering of the Palestine refugees and in preventing the total destabilization of their situation. UNRWA had also been instrumental in preserving the rights of the Palestine refugees throughout more than half a century. The Palestine refugees continued to be denied their right to return, which could not be altered or diminished regardless of the passage of time.

Finland's representative, speaking on behalf of the European Union and underlining the crucial role of UNRWA in alleviating the plight of Palestinian refugees, expressed serious concern at the deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and financial situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The closure system was the primary cause of the humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Union was particularly concerned at the humanitarian conditions of Palestinian refugee children and called on the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to give children special protection. It also urged the Israeli Government to ensure full and secure access for all diplomatic and humanitarian personnel and goods.

Other speakers noted the Agency should not be hampered in any way by Israel. They stressed that UNRWA should be reimbursed for taxes and fees levied on it and that UNRWA staff should enjoy the same protections and immunities as international workers from other agencies.

The representative of Norway introduced the report of the Working Group on the financing of the UNRWA.

Also taking the floor this afternoon were the representatives of Iran, the Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Bangladesh, Cuba, Kuwait, Syria and Tunisia.

The Fourth Committee will meet again at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, 1 November to continue its discussion of UNRWA.

Background

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) met this afternoon to begin its consideration of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (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/61/13](#)), covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2005. 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. UNRWA is an advocate of — and seeks to safeguard — the rights of Palestine refugees and act as a witness and a protecting presence in areas of humanitarian crisis and conflict. It encompasses programmes in education, health, relief and social services, and microfinance and micro-enterprise.

The report states that the environment in which UNRWA carried out its operations in 2005 was again dominated by events in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel. Israel's evacuation of its settlements in the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank was the most significant political development. UNRWA hoped that the disengagement would bring a relaxation of the closure regime and unfettered access for Palestinian goods to the outside world, thereby leading to an economic recovery. However, such relaxation had not taken place. Following the Palestinian elections of January, the consequent suspension of aid and tax revenues and the non-payment of salaries to Palestinian Authority employees compelled the Agency to expand its emergency operations.

The modest easing in the political situation was reflected in a slight improvement in Palestinian economic indicators, with gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the West Bank and the Gaza reaching 8 to 9 per cent, according to the report. However, unemployment during the third quarter of 2005 was at 23 per cent, with unemployment among 20 to 24 year-olds at 35 per cent. About 53 per cent of the Palestinian population still fell below the poverty line, with perhaps 15 per cent living in deep poverty.

According to the report, significant political and security developments also took place in the Lebanon field of operations, with the killing of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Syrian troop withdrawal and the election of a new Government. In June 2005, the Minister of Labour announced the easing of work permit restrictions on Palestinians in Lebanon, which led to a new Lebanese/Palestinian dialogue. In November 2005, three hotels in Amman, Jordan, were targeted by suicide bombers, resulting in the deaths of 59 people.

As to internal developments, the report states that UNRWA, in its continued process of management reform, benefited from a review by the Overseas Development Institute's Humanitarian Policy Group and by the Department for International Development. It had, in partnership with the University of Geneva, pursued a project of data collection and analysis that would enable it to better understand the profile and needs of refugees. The Agency had also started a study that should lead to a new approach to poverty analysis in its relief and social services programme. The Agency also formalized the provision of services to needy family members of refugee women married to non-refugees. The groundwork has been laid for gender mainstreaming in the Agency's operation.

The report states that on 21 December 2004, the Gaza Strip returned to United Nations security phase II and that relocated staff returned to their duty stations. However, the brief kidnapping of staff members led to an extended relocation of Gaza-based international staff to Amman and Jerusalem, as did the bombing of the United Nations Reporting and Evacuation Centre in Gaza City on 1 January. Despite those events, all programme and emergency operations continued. The Agency notes with regret that the 12,000 local UNRWA staff in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are the only United Nations staff members working in the area who do not receive hazard pay.

During the reporting period, restrictions on the freedom of movement of Agency staff, vehicles and goods continued to be imposed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory by the Israeli authorities. Those restrictions undermined the Agency's ability to provide its essential and emergency services. Many of the restrictions were, in the Agency's view, in violation of applicable international law and did not relate to military security. At the end of the reporting period, 47 staff members were being detained, of whom 34 by Israel, 10 by the Palestinian authorities and one each by Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

As for finances, the report states that the Agency expended \$484.2 million during 2005 against a budget of \$537.7 million on its regular, project and emergency appeal activities. Education remained the largest programme in 2005, accounting for almost 60 per cent of the budget. Health, relief and social services, common services and operational and technical services counted for 18, 10, 8 and 5 per cent, respectively. The level of budget implementation was constrained by the fragile security situation, especially in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Some of the \$19.2 million positive variance is thus due to the fact that certain earmarked activities could not be implemented.

Reports of the Department of Inspection and Oversight Services relating to audit, inspection, investigation, fraud prevention and fraud detection contained 259 recommendations/conclusions for management action. UNRWA management had fully accepted 228 recommendations and had implemented 81 of them (36 per cent) by the end of the reporting period. Assignments were undertaken in all five field offices and headquarters to ensure adherence to internal controls and to establish an antifraud environment in the Agency.

The report then offers performance reports of its subprogrammes — education, health, relief and social services, microfinance and micro-enterprise — including performance by indicators.

Also before the Committee was a 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/61/347](#)) which describes the Group's activities over 2006 and provides a detailed outline of UNRWA's current financial situation. The Group anticipated an increased funding gap of \$129.1 million in the Agency's 2006 regular budget and remains concerned the trend will continue. This year's project budget deficit was expected to rise to \$132.1 million from \$13.9 million in 2005, following incorporation of key infrastructure provisions from the Agency's medium term plan for 2005-2009, for which funding had fallen far short of requirements.

Contributions to UNRWA in 2006 also fell far short of the Agency's budgeted expenditure. UNRWA continued to appeal to donors to fully fund its budget for the 2006-2007 biennium, as the Agency represented the principal source of general education, primary health, social, relief and microfinance services for the refugee population. UNRWA remained concerned about port and related charges due to it, exacerbated by security procedures imposed on humanitarian goods imported through Israel. Transit charges imposed on containers moving through Karni had obliged UNRWA to pay \$98,396 in 2005, a charge — among others — from which UNRWA argued it should be exempt.

The report also notes the Working Group's concern that 80 per cent of registered refugees in Gaza were currently dependent on UNRWA food aid for their essential sustenance and that the degree of their vulnerability and dependence had increased compared with the early years of the current unrest in the Occupied

Palestinian Territory.

The large funding gap for UNRWA regular budget in 2006 underlines that it is the responsibility of the international community to ensure that UNRWA services are maintained at an acceptable level in quantitative and qualitative terms and that funding keeps pace with the natural growth of the refugee population and its changing needs.

It calls, therefore, for the early and complete fulfilment of pledges and other commitments to UNRWA, in particular the reimbursement of value added tax and port charges by the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel. The Group urges the international community to fund the 2006-2007 budget fully and calls upon the Government of Israel to accord free and unfettered access to the Agency, in particular in the Gaza Strip.

The Committee also had for its consideration the report of the Secretary-General on persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities (document A/61/358), which refers to correspondence between the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representative of Israel regarding actions taken by Israel's Government in implementing resolution 60/101.

That text reaffirms the right of all persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities to return to their former places of residence and endorses the efforts of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA to continue to provide humanitarian assistance to such persons, on an emergency basis and as a temporary measure.

On 4 May, the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to the Permanent Representative of Israel, in which he requested information on any action his Government had taken or envisaged taking in implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolution. No reply was received.

The report also presents the information made available by the Commissioner-General to the Secretary-General on the return of refugees registered with the Agency to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from places outside the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Agency is not involved in any arrangements for the return of displaced persons who are not registered as refugees. So far as is known to the Agency, between 1 July 2005 and 30 June 2006, 1,272 refugees returned to the West Bank and 102 to the Gaza Strip. However, some of these may not themselves have been displaced in 1967, but may be members of the family of a displaced registered refugee. In that context, the number of displaced registered refugees known by the Agency to have returned to the occupied territories since June 1967 is about 26,534.

Also before the Committee was a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (document A/61/172), covering the period from 1 September 2005 to 31 August 2006, in which the Commission observes that since its report of 19 August 2005 (document A/60/277) it has nothing new to report.

The Committee had before it a report of the Secretary-General on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues (document A/61/278), stating that on 4 May, the Secretary-General sent notes verbales to Israel and all other Member States and drawing their attention to the relevant provisions of resolutions 60/100 to 60/103. He requested information by 30 June concerning any action taken or envisaged in relation to their implementation.

The Secretary-General received one reply, dated 30 June, in which Sweden's representative stated that his country is the third largest donor to UNRWA and a member of the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to UNRWA. This year, Sweden had transferred contributions amounting to \$31.35 million and has contributed \$5.45 million to UNRWA Emergency Appeal. As his Government did not hold any record of Palestinian property, assets or property rights in Israel, he could not provide any of the information asked for in Assembly resolution 60/103.

Introduction of Reports by Commissioner-General

KAREN KONING ABUZAYD, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, said this year's report had differed from past reports in that it used the calendar year as the reporting period and focused on UNRWA's most significant programme outcomes to reflect efforts to become more results-oriented in its programming.

UNRWA's mandate entrusted it with humanitarian and human development responsibilities for Palestine refugees, she said. The Agency discharged its duty through several education, health, social welfare, microcredit and shelter services in five fields of operation: Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and Gaza. Education was the largest programme, serving 500,000 primary and preparatory school children. Some 125 health centres delivered primary health care services; however, there was a growing need to provide care currently beyond the Agency's reach. The relief and social services programme served as a "social safety net" for refugees, as a critical source of food, cash and other one-time assistance. The microfinance and micro-enterprise programme, almost 15 years old, was the largest microcredit provider in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and had been extended to the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan. Almost \$16 million in loans had been financed in 2005, versus \$18 million a year earlier.

She said UNRWA's ability to deliver assistance effectively in times of crisis had most recently been seen in Lebanon where UNRWA's 2,800 staff had maintained health and relief services throughout the conflict, delivering food and other assistance to those unable to reach distribution centres. In total, about 20,000 displaced persons had taken shelter either inside refugee camps or within UNRWA facilities. In Jordan and Syria, staff collaborated with other United Nations agencies to facilitate the evacuation of those fleeing the conflict.

As a humanitarian agency, UNRWA applauded Lebanon's inclusion of an early recovery plan of \$3 million worth of projects for the refugee camps, underlining the Government's commitment to ensuring that improvement of refugees living conditions became an integral part of reconstruction, she continued.

She said the Occupied Palestinian Territory had become a byword for violations of international law and the hardship and deprivation of the Palestine refugee experience. Reports indicated that between July and the end of September, Gaza sustained 5,300 artillery shells and more than 292 air strikes. In the same period, 298 Palestinians had been killed in Gaza, 49 of them children. Two Israelis had been killed and 28 injured from 424 home-made rockets fired into Israel.

In Gaza and the West Bank, recent surveys showed that nearly 87 per cent of Gaza and 56 per cent of West Bank residents lived below the official poverty line and were unable to support themselves without assistance, she stated. In the West Bank, commerce had been reduced to a trickle by the barrier around Jerusalem, the tri-sectioning of the West Bank and a draconian permit regime. Travel to and from Jerusalem was impossible for most Palestinians. The separation barrier in the West Bank was a concern and the impact seemed to be fading from international attention.

On institutional matters, she said UNRWA had begun a long-term process of reforms and UNRWA's Advisory Commission was discussing an organizational development plan. Management reforms were vital for UNRWA to improve its overall performance. In that context, she said the Advisory Commission had been expanded to 24 members and observers. On staff security, she drew attention to the fact that UNRWA's Palestinian staff were the only United Nations employees in Israel and the occupied territory who did not receive hazard pay. She reiterated her appeal to address that situation.

UNRWA's financial support came entirely from voluntary contributions, she said. This year, UNRWA faced a deficit of some \$107 million; UNRWA had raised \$138 million out of some \$171 million for its revised 2006 Emergency Appeal.

Interactive Dialogue

Commissioner-General KONING ABUZAYD, addressing questions and remarks posed by the representatives of Iran and Syria, said she had no figures on the negative economic impact of the separation wall. However, there were direct impacts on individual lives, as people could not reach their land. There were also issues of titles to land. UNRWA concentrated on the social effects on people's lives, as they were separated from their relatives and their work. The obvious effects were seen more easily in the Jerusalem area, where families had been broken up and some had to give up their job.

She said that people could not reach medical services. Children were moved from one school to another as they could not reach their former school anymore. The economic cost to UNRWA was that it had had to develop mobile clinics in the West Bank.

The representative of Israel said he would be grateful for clarifications from the briefing. The annual report had used the calendar year, but most of the briefing had related to 2006, particularly since the abduction of an Israeli soldier outside of Gaza in July, and other events inside Israel near the Lebanese border. The Committee wanted to open the debate and include events shaping the Middle East over the past year, it was important to include the Syrian assassination of Prime Minister Hariri and Iranian support of Hizbollah. He wanted to be clear about whether the Committee was discussing 2005 or 2006.

Further, according to UNRWA's mandate, the Agency was tasked with helping refugees; however, parts of the briefing had related to issues including the prospect for Palestinian statehood and Jewish settlements in the territories. He said it could be argued that anything happening in the territories affected the refugees. However, if there was to be discussion about the prospect of future conflict settlement, it was important to frame the debate accordingly.

The representative of Syria, responding to comments made by the representative of Israel that Syria had assassinated Mr. Hariri, said the Israeli accusations had nothing to do with reality. It was important to look at who had benefited from the crime against Mr. Hariri. He said Israel had benefited from that crime and Israel was trying to politicize humanitarian questions.

The representative of Iran said he was responding to the Israeli representative's allegation of Iranian support of Hizbollah and his reference to a period that had not been included in the High Commissioner's report. Unfortunately, the Israeli representative was diverting attention from the catastrophes taking place in Palestine. He asked the question: did the Commission have figures related to the segregation created by the "apartheid wall"? The wall had had a great impact on the Palestinian people, especially economically. UNRWA should take care of the livelihood of the Palestinians so that they could work freely and become economically self-sufficient. That would take financial pressure off of UNRWA.

KONING ABUZAYD replied that the format of the report had been changed, so that it also covered the last part of 2005, which had been covered in the last report as well. The Advisory Commission had approved that format, but had asked that she bring everyone up to speed. She had addressed some events in 2006 as it would have been included in the old format report, also on the advice of the Advisory Commission.

She said UNRWA had avoided discussions on peacebuilding and the like in the past and had stuck to its humanitarian role. However, this year's situation was so much more serious. The 2007 Emergency Appeal was higher than in any year since the intifada. UNRWA was treating the symptoms of the political problems and it appealed to the political actors to do something about it. Political will had been mobilized over Lebanon, why not also mobilize the political will over the Occupied Palestinian Territory, she asked.

The representative of Senegal congratulated UNRWA staff and thanked all donor States and institutions that had provided support to the Palestine refugees and in particular Lebanon and Jordan. The report was excellent, detailed and well-researched. He drew attention to the consequences of the war on the social situation of the refugees.

The representative of Lebanon said that, unfortunately, the Israeli delegate had raised rhetoric that had nothing to do with the debate. Once again, he had addressed Hizbollah. Lebanon condemned all forms of terrorism. Lebanon had been a victim of the ultimate form of terrorism: State terrorism. It had suffered from foreign occupation since 1978. He noted that Hizbollah did not exist before 1978 or before 1982, when the Israeli invasion had reached Beirut. Hizbollah was a popular reaction against occupation. He expressed appreciation for the work UNRWA did in Lebanon.

The representative of the Sudan said he had closely read the report and knew that UNRWA was working in extremely difficult situations. Nonetheless, UNRWA had made significant achievements. He said he would make a statement tomorrow and would reiterate his delegation's gratitude towards UNRWA.

Introduction of Report

BERIT ENGE (Norway) introduced the report of the Working Group on the financing of the UNRWA (document A/61/347) and urged the international community to fully fund the Agency's revised Emergency Appeal for 2006. She said the Working Group had called for the early and complete fulfilment of pledges and other commitments to UNRWA, in particular the reimbursement of value added tax by the Palestinian Authority and port and related charges by the Israeli Government.

She said the Working Group had noted with satisfaction that the Agency had prepared a comprehensive development plan for the 12 refugee camps located in Lebanon, which called for an investment of \$50 million. The Group continued to believe that UNRWA played a vital role in preserving the stability and security of the region. Its cost-effective services constituted a vital investment in the human development and well-being of the refugees by the international community. The continued commitment of the international community to the refugees remained essential in the absence of a just and durable solution to their problem and in light of the continuing conflicts in the region which had devastating economic and social consequences for them.

Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine, commenting on the previous discussion, said the Palestinian people inside and outside of the occupied territories had one representative, namely the Palestinian Authority. As for the reference to the political process and solutions, he said the mandate of UNRWA was to look after the plight of the refugees until there was a just solution. As a result of that mandate, UNRWA was entitled to deal with political situations.

He said the report was a sobering reminder of the continuing difficulties for Palestinian refugees and of the crucial need for the assistance provided by UNRWA. The Agency's efforts had been vital in alleviating the suffering of the Palestine refugees and in preventing the total destabilization of their situation. UNRWA had also been instrumental in preserving the rights of the Palestine refugees throughout more than half a century. The Palestine refugees continued to be denied their right to return, which could not be altered or diminished regardless of the passage of time. The just resolution of the plight of the Palestine refugees, in accordance with resolution 194 (III) of 1948, remained one of the highest priorities for Palestine.

He said the passage of time had deeply compounded the tragedy of the Palestine refugees, who now numbered more than four million. There were furthermore hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who had been displaced from their homes in 1967. Their right to return had been affirmed in Security Council resolution 237 (1967). If Israel had respected and complied with international law and the resolutions of the United Nations, the problem of the Palestine refugees and the displaced persons would long ago have been resolved. The grave deterioration of the political, socio-economic and security situation in the occupied territories and in Lebanon had seriously impacted the already difficult situation of the Palestine refugees. In recent months, hundreds of refugee families had suffered from loss of life, injury and further dispossession and displacement as a result of Israel's intensified military aggression.

In addition to the escalation of conflict, the situation of the refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, had further deteriorated as a result of ongoing illegal Israeli practices, including severe restrictions on the freedom of movement, the suspension of international assistance and Israel's withholding of tax revenues, he said. Poverty, unemployment, food insecurity and instability had dramatically risen. Those developments had overburdened UNRWA's financial and human resources. Moreover, restrictions and closures imposed by the occupying Power had seriously undermined the Agency's operations. The occupying Power had continued to harass, arrest and detain the Agency's staff and had caused damage to UNRWA facilities.

He said the international community must call upon Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately lift all restrictions on the movement of the Agency's staff, vehicles and supplies and ensure their safety. Israel must also reimburse the Agency for storage and transit charges levied. He expressed his deepest gratitude to the donor community for its continuing generous support of the UNRWA and commended the Agency for the reform measures undertaken. He urged all donors to increase their contributions and to respond to the emergency appeals to the extent possible. The international community's unwavering support of UNRWA, along with its continued political support pending a just and lasting resolution of the Palestine refugee problem, were crucial for the welfare and stability of the refugees and of the region as a whole.

HAMAD RASHID NASSEB ALMANSOORI (United Arab Emirates) said UNRWA's report once again reflected the increased suffering of the Palestinian people due to the continued Israeli occupation, the escalation of military aggressions and the blockades on Gaza. Some Palestinian camps in Lebanon had been destroyed in July. There had never been any interruption in the Israeli illegal measures, including confiscations and destruction of land and properties and building new settlements for absorbing immigrants from all over the world, in disregard of the relevant United Nations resolutions.

He said his country strongly condemned the Israeli policies in placing obstacles in the way of the work of the Agency, including restrictions on movement and detention of the Agency's staff, imposition of heavy fees on relief supplies and deliberate destruction of some of its service facilities. The resulting disruption of most of UNRWA's programmes had led to increased levels of unemployment, poverty, disease and food insecurity among the Palestinian refugees. He stressed the continued primary responsibility of the international community towards finding a just and lasting solution for the Palestinian refugees, including their right to voluntarily return to their homeland and compensation for damages.

He called upon the donor countries and agencies, including the World Bank, to maximize their contributions to UNRWA to enable it to overcome the major financial difficulties it was facing. He called upon Israel, the occupying Power to cease its policy of attacks and blockades and to remove all obstacles placed in the way of the Agency's work. He reaffirmed the importance of fulfilling the mandate of UNRWA in the five main regions of operations, including the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, without discrimination. The Palestinian refugee problem could not be resolved without achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution for the Palestinian cause and the Middle East that included establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al Sharif as its capital.

ADEL ADAILEH (Jordan) applauded UNRWA's efforts to mitigate the suffering of Palestinian refugees. His delegation annually reaffirmed its position towards the Palestinian refugee question, as it was a major component of the social and political situation in Jordan. More than 42 per cent of Jordan's population was Palestinian refugees and there was a need for a solution to the question based on resolution 194, which stressed the need for the right to return, resolution 237, and article 8 of the Jordanian-Israeli Treaty.

He said Jordan annually covered the costs of health and social services for refugees in 13 refugee camps in Jordan, despite a deficit in the national budget, to mitigate their difficult living conditions. Further, his Government sometimes ensured coverage of services that extended beyond the Agency's scope, as the needs of refugees continued to grow. The services in Jordan accounted for 20 per cent of its budget, despite the fact that over 40 per cent of the refugee population lived in Jordan. To improve economic and social living conditions, Jordan had adopted in 1999 a "Social Safety Package" plan that covered the camps; total expenditure on the camps amounted to \$50 million. Thus, when Jordan called for the continuation of UNRWA operations, his country called attention to the dangerous conditions UNRWA faced. He reaffirmed the need to consider Palestinian refugee needs irrespective of their geographic locations.

On other matters, he said he would like to see facilitation of movement of UNRWA staff in the Palestinian territories, as there were severe restrictions on their transit. That alone had had adverse impacts on Palestinian refugee camps. UNRWA had incurred additional costs on its budget that was already overstretched. Jordan supported UNRWA's expansion of its Advisory Commission, adding that any application for membership should be examined on its own merits. He fully appreciated efforts to improve the Agency's work and hoped those efforts would have a positive financial impact on UNRWA.

TAREQ MD. ARIFUL ISLAM (Bangladesh) said the fact that UNRWA had to expand once again its emergency operations in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Lebanon instead of the expected phasing out of its activities was a sad commentary on the situation. He was particularly dismayed at the imposition of the de facto sanctions regime following the election of the new Government in Palestine. He appealed to the donor countries and communities to maintain adequate levels of funding commensurate with the expanded emergency requirements of UNRWA. Movement of the Palestinian people and goods had come under heavy restrictions and were responsible for the Palestinian economy not being able to fully realize its productive potential. He urged Israel to immediately and fully withdraw all such restrictions.

He remained deeply concerned at the continued imposition of restrictions by Israel on the movements of UNRWA personnel and vehicles. Continued construction of the separation wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was exacerbating the situation. Israel must ensure unrestricted mobility and non-interference in the activities of the Agency. Welcoming the reform efforts of the Agency, he said that for Bangladesh, the birthplace of microcredit finance, it was gratifying to observe the success of the microfinance and micro-enterprise programme of the Agency. The awarding of the Nobel Prize to the proponent of microcredit Professor Muhammad Yunus also bore testimony to the effectiveness of the programme in poverty reduction.

REBECA HERNANDEZ TOLEDANO (Cuba) said UNRWA had helped to improve the terrible living conditions of Palestinian refugees since its creation 56 years ago. She said it was unjustifiable that Palestinians continued to suffer the brutal Israeli military occupation of their land and that they continued to be denied their fundamental human rights, including the right of self-determination and of return to their land. The deterioration of the political, economic, social and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was "distressing". That situation was the consequence of the ongoing illegal Israeli policies and practices. The so-called "withdrawal" of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip and the evacuation of that area's settlements had not been the beginning of the end of Israel's "genocidal policy" in that area. Israel's unilateral measures in the Occupied Palestinian Territory posed a grave threat to achieving an agreement based on a two-State solution.

She said Cuba condemned the extrajudicial executions, border blockades, destruction of homes and indiscriminate use of force, which had become permanent attributes of Israeli actions. Further, Israel's ignoring of United Nations resolutions marked a violation of international law. Also, the freezing of bank transactions by Israel and major donors this year had worsened the situation.

She commended UNRWA's management of the budget, adding that Israeli authorities continued to impose unacceptable restrictions on the freedom of movement of UNRWA personnel, assets and vehicles, which undermined its ability to provide essential services. She regretted that the implementation level of the Agency's budget was limited by security concerns. It was important that UNRWA receive all necessary support to perform its functions. Cuba favoured the Palestinian people's inalienable rights to self-determination and to establish an independent and sovereign State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

MANSOUR AYYAD SH. A. AL-OTABI (Kuwait) said that UNRWA had done everything possible to provide services in its areas of activity and should continue to exist until the situation of the Palestinian refugees was addressed. However, major financial difficulties were an obstacle to the continued provision of services. He stressed the importance of UNRWA carrying out its functions within its five areas of activities without discrimination.

He said Kuwait had provided material assistance to refugees and had funded infrastructure projects through international bodies. In addition to its contribution of \$1.5 million to the regular budget of UNRWA, it had made an additional voluntary contribution of \$1 million to alleviate suffering caused by Israel. The Israeli actions had continued unabated for many years. It was regrettable that the Israeli military hampered the work of UNRWA and illegally arrested UNRWA personnel. The same immunities extended to international workers should be extended to local UNRWA staff. The principle of land for peace should be observed as well as the provisions of the Road Map, which should ultimately lead to an independent State of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital.

BASHAR JA'AFARI ([Syria](#)) commending UNRWA's role in attenuating the suffering of Palestinians, said his delegation supported UNRWA, especially in the context of Israel's irresponsible policies. Events in the Middle East over the past 58 years had culminated in the current situation. Syria would like to see the end of the problem, with rights restored to Palestinians, including their right to return to their land. Palestinians should be allowed to return to their homes from which they had been forcibly removed.

He said Israel was disregarding resolutions and breaching human rights instruments that had provided for the right of all individual's not to be removed from their countries. That practice was continuing today, as Palestinians constituted the largest number of refugees in the world, with 500,000 in Syria and 1 million in Jordan.

The continuation of the extrajudicial executions, deportation of families and the construction of the wall that had been condemned by the United Nations had been wrongly interpreted by Israel as a "green light" to carry out its policy of death and deportation. Further, Israeli practices and ill treatment had increased the number of internally displaced persons within the Palestinian territories. Their situation had been compounded by the latest Israeli attacks that had turned Gaza into a scene of death and destruction.

He said that Israeli occupation had involved outrages against UNRWA property, including 10 attacks against seven UNRWA schools, violating the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Israel had refused to pay compensation for those damages and it had imposed measures preventing movement of goods into the Gaza Strip.

He said Syria's Government fully supported Palestinians in that country and had extended financial commitments to them. They were treated as citizens, without discrimination. There was an international responsibility to ensure that UNRWA was able to function until its work was completed and he called on the international community to respond to the urgent appeals of the Commissioner-General. He was concerned that nothing was being said about compensation for UNRWA staff working in difficult conditions. They were entitled to compensation.

TAISTO HUIMASALO ([Finland](#)), speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States, said the Union as the largest contributor to UNRWA, provided more than half of the Agency's income. The Union commended the work of the expanded Advisory Commission and strongly supported the organizational development process. The conflict in Lebanon had most directly affected some 203,000 refugees in and around Saida and Tyre, where Lebanese civilians had sought refuge. UNRWA, however, had extended its support to anyone who needed help.

Expressing serious concern at the deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and financial situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he said the closure system was the primary cause of the humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. He recalled in that regard the utmost importance of the full implementation of the Agreements on Movement and Access. The Union continued to be concerned at the humanitarian conditions of Palestinian refugee children and called on the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to give children special protection. It also urged the Israeli Government to ensure full and secure access for all diplomatic and humanitarian personnel and goods.

He said 87 per cent of Gaza and 56 per cent of West Bank residents were totally dependent on outside international assistance. The Temporary International Mechanism was bringing in badly needed support. He encouraged donors to make full use of the mechanism. He also called for an immediate resumption of transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues by Israel through the Temporary International Mechanism. Deeply concerned at the ongoing violence, the European Union called on the Palestinian leadership to bring an end to violence and terrorist activities, including the firing of rockets. While recognizing Israel's right to protect its citizens, the European Union remained deeply concerned at the continued Israeli operation in the Palestinian territories. It called on all Palestinian factions to end their internal strife.

The European Union urged Israel to freeze all settlement activities and to end the construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian land, he said. The Union remained particularly concerned by the settlement building and separation barrier construction in and around East Jerusalem. Reaffirming its commitment to a negotiated two-State solution agreed between the parties, the Union would not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed by the parties. As long as the conflict was not resolved, peace would not be secured anywhere in the region. He hoped that positive developments would soon be produced, leading to a fair, stable and equitable solution to the Palestinian refugees issue in the framework of a final and comprehensive permanent status agreement. Until then, the services provided by UNRWA remained essential to ensure a decent life to Palestinian refugees in the Middle East.

KAIS KABTANI ([Tunisia](#)) expressed his country's gratitude to UNRWA for its sustained efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people in difficult conditions. He also extended gratitude to the countries that hosted Palestinian refugees and to donor countries for their support of UNRWA. The crucial role of UNRWA in providing basic services to Palestinian refugees should continue and be consolidated in line of the needs of the Palestinian refugees until they could exercise their rights. He called upon the international community to step up efforts to provide support to the refugees.

He said the grave situation of Palestine refugees was directly related to the policies of blockades which had a negative impact on UNRWA's provision of services. Israel's targeting of the services and facilities of UNRWA and threatening of UNRWA staff was against international humanitarian law. He called for urgent measures to remove restrictions on movement of UNRWA staff. Tunisia had provided material support to UNRWA in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestine refugees.

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