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Sixtieth General Assembly
Fourth Committee
20th Meeting (PM)

FOURTH COMMITTEE CONCLUDES GENERAL DEBATE ON EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION,

ADOPTS RELATED DRAFT RESOLUTION WITHOUT VOTE

**It Also Takes Up General Assembly Revitalization,
Begins Considering Work of UN Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees**

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Background

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) met this afternoon to take action on a draft resolution on the effects of atomic radiation. It was also expected to take up its agenda item on the revitalization of the Fourth Committee, and to begin its consideration of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

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According to the non-paper, members noted that considerable progress has been made in streamlining the resolutions on the item "United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East". Concerning the item "Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories", members agreed in their hope for genuine progress in the Middle East which would facilitate the streamlining of resolutions under that agenda item.

For its consideration of the UNRWA, the Committee had before it the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (document [A/59/13](#)) for the period 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005, which says that the first part of the reporting period was characterized by the continuation of strife in the occupied Palestinian territory. There were numerous military incursions by the Israel Defense Forces in the Gaza Strip, particularly Rafah, and later in Beit Hamoun, Beit Lahia and Jabalia. A total of 107 Palestinians were killed and 431 injured in those military operations. During the first part of the reporting period, the Israeli military operations in the northern Gaza Strip had significantly increased the level of danger to which international UNRWA staff were exposed. The second part of the reporting period was characterized by relative calm, however, and there was greater cooperation by the Defense Forces.

The severe economic depression of the Palestinian economy continued unabated, the report says. According to the World Bank, unemployment declined slightly in the West Bank at the end of 2004, the overall unemployment rate rose to 26.8 per cent, with unemployment in the Gaza Strip rising to 36 per cent. Palestinian per capita income remained some 35 per cent lower than its pre-intifada level. As a result, over half the Palestinian population continued to live below the poverty line.

During the reporting period, 31 UNRWA staff members were arrested and/or detained by the Israeli authorities, and the Agency was systematically refused access to staff in detention, the report continues. In most cases, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has yet to follow up on any of the Agency's requests for official information concerning the charges against them. The Agency notes with regret that the 12,000 local UNRWA staff in the occupied Palestinian territory are,

ironically, the only United Nations staff members working in the area who do not receive hazard pay.

According to the report, military operations by the Israeli forces, in the West Bank, including curfews and closures and the creation of closed military zones, had an adverse impact on the Agency's ability to carry out its humanitarian functions. Movement of humanitarian goods, particularly in places where supplies of food, medicines and other items were urgently needed, was often blocked, delayed or made very difficult. The UNRWA hoped that the implementation of the disengagement plan, beginning on 15 August 2005, as initiated by the Government of Israel, could bring a relaxation of the closure regime and unfettered access for Palestinian goods to the outside world. The Agency did not, however, exclude the possibility that the disengagement would maintain most restrictions on the freedom of movement of persons and goods. In such a situation, the Agency would be called upon to step up its efforts to ameliorate the suffering of the refugees, which would require significant increases in extrabudgetary contributions.

At the end of the reporting period, the UNRWA had prepared contingency plans to address developments, which might occur during disengagement, the report says. The UNRWA planning was facilitated by extensive cooperation with the Israel Defense Forces, which made substantial efforts to ensure that humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian population would not be unduly disrupted by the disengagement process.

The Government of Israel proceeded with the construction of a separation barrier inside the West Bank, the report continues. The barrier has already led to the further impoverishment and isolation of refugee families living in its vicinity and has created new obstacles to the delivery of essential UNRWA services to them. The UNRWA remains concerned that both the existing construction and its further extension will constitute a new and formidable obstacle to the delivery of the Agency's services to the affected population.

During the period under review, the UNRWA continued to implement its regular programme, providing education, health, social services and microcredit assistance to refugees in its five fields of operation — the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, the report says. It also finalized and presented its medium-term plan, focusing on areas that would be crucial to promoting stability, such as training, expanding credit opportunities and job creation, and mapping out the Agency's priorities over the next five years. The Agency also followed up on recommendations from the Geneva Conference of 2004, as a result of which a working-group on stakeholder relations was set up, and an expansion of the UNRWA Advisory Commission was proposed.

The report states that appeals for assistance from the international community to fund the Agency's emergency programmes in the occupied Palestinian territory were issued for 2004 (\$193.6 million) and for 2005 (\$185.8 million). The response to those appeals has gradually decreased as the crisis entered its fifth year, and other world crises diverted the attention of donors. In 2003, contributions covered 53 per cent of the needs, while contributions for 2005 were expected to rise slightly. Continued support of the UNRWA Emergency Appeal is crucial to the survival of the Palestine refugees. The report then describes in detail its activities regarding education, health, relief and social services as well as financial and legal matters.

In Addendum 1 to the report, the UNRWA presents its programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007, which totals some \$1.6 billion, of which some \$187 million is earmarked for the project budget. During the biennium 2006-2007, the Agency would continue to provide basic education, health and relief and social services to more than 4 million registered Palestine refugees. It will also continue to offer services under its Microfinance and Microenterprise Programme. In addition, the Agency intends to develop a comprehensive approach to camp development that will integrate housing and infrastructure interventions with health, education, microfinance and micro-enterprise, and community services within a human development framework. For that purpose, the Agency has established a Camp Development Unit to address the housing conditions of about 1.3 million refugees.

According to the report, the Microfinance and Microenterprise Programme will be funded primarily from revenues generated from the programme's credit operations and from donor contributions. Capital improvements regarding the UNRWA facilities and camp infrastructure as well as other major developments, including the Palestine Refugees Records Project, will continue to be provided for under the project budget. According to the budget, the UNRWA has developed its own strategic plan known as the Medium Term Plan for the period 2005-2009, which articulates the Agency's desire to take advantage of technological advances, consolidate its achievements and better serve the long-term interests of refugees. The plan is necessary to help prepare refugees to contribute to and take advantage of any positive changes that may be realized in the region.

Enhanced capacity for collection, analysis and management of data will complement ongoing reform efforts in the Agency's budgetary process, according to the budget proposal. The UNRWA recognizes that its governance processes do not as yet fulfil their potential as mechanisms for information sharing, substantive policy guidance and mutual accountability. The Agency is committed to working initially to identify a reform formula that allows for substantive discussion on concrete policy issues, while respecting the imperatives of its mandate.

Continually seeking ways to stretch limited resources, the Agency aims to achieve a series of efficiency gains and savings, the report says. However, insufficient project funding for school construction and upgrading of camp infrastructure call for substantial capital investment. The financial results for the fiscal year 2004 clearly illustrate the funding shortfalls for implementing the UNRWA's mandate. The funding gap for the regular budget amounted to \$8.7 million and the projects budget experienced a shortfall of \$23 million. Current projections of income and expenditure for 2005 indicate a funding gap for the regular budget of \$11.1 million and unless further contributions are forthcoming, the Agency will not be in a position to fully implement its budgeted activities in 2005.

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/60/439](#)), which describes the Group's activities over 2005 and provides a detailed outline of the UNRWA's current financial situation. The Group notes the declining funding gap in the Agency's regular budget, but remains concerned that the trend will not be maintained. It calls, therefore, for the early and complete fulfilment of pledges and other commitments to the UNRWA, in particular the reimbursement of VAT 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 enhance its cooperation with the Agency to maximize the benefit of donor contributions by ensuring speedy delivery of UNRWA services.

The report states that although the Working Group agrees that the problem of the refugees is deeply rooted in a political issue that originated more than half a century ago, the problem faced by the refugees today are humanitarian ones that must be addressed as a shared international responsibility. The services provided by the UNRWA must be viewed as the minimum required to enable the refugees to lead productive lives. Any further reduction in those services would not only unfairly deprive the refugees, but could also have a destabilizing effect on the entire region. The Working Group, therefore, strongly urges all Governments to bear those considerations in mind when deciding upon the level of their contributions to the UNRWA for 2006.

Also before the Committee was a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (document [A/60/277](#)), covering the period from 1 September 2004 to 31 August 2005, to the General Assembly.

The Committee also had before it the report of the Secretary-General on persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities (document [A/60/212](#)), which refers to correspondence between the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representative of Israel regarding actions taken by Israel's Government in implementing resolution 59/118. 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 the UNRWA to continue to provide humanitarian assistance to such persons, on an emergency basis and as a temporary measure.

In a note verbale dated 12 July 2005, the representative of Israel noted that the resolution came against the backdrop of positive developments in the region, including the impending unilateral disengagement of Israel from the Gaza Strip and expressed his disappointment that the resolution did not take into account these new developments, or reflect the spirit of reform now prevalent in the General Assembly.

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 2004 and 30 June 2005, 489 refugees returned to the West Bank and 74 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 25,160.

Also before the Committee was a report of the Secretary-General on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues (document [A/60/256](#)), stating that on 24 May 2005, the Secretary-General sent notes verbales to Israel and all other Member States and drawing their attention to the relevant provisions of resolutions 59/117 to 59/120. He requested information by 15 June 2005 concerning any action taken or envisaged in relation to their implementation.

In a reply dated 12 July 2005, Israel's representative expressed the State's desire to end all acts of violence and terrorism in the region, improve the humanitarian situation and achieve a negotiated settlement in the context of the Road Map. Israel was dismayed, however, at a number of issues related to the misuse and politicization of the UNRWA and its disregard for the campaign of terror waged against Israeli civilians by Palestinian terror organizations. Israel urged the Agency to draw attention to the misuse of Palestinian "refugee camps" by terrorist groups in blatant violation of Security Council resolutions and international law. Such activity posed a clear danger to the safety and security of the civilian population and compromised the fulfilment of the UNRWA's mission.

A reply from Syria dated 14 July 2005 condemned Israel's persistence in the policies of killing, destruction and closure, and the building of the Separation Wall, which constituted an aggression against the officials of the UNRWA and its installations. Such policies exacerbated the sufferings of the Palestine refugees and were incompatible with the resolutions of international legitimacy and international law. Syria, affirming the right of all those displaced since June 1967 to return to their homes, and expressing its grave concern about the security, welfare and living conditions of the refugees, called on the international community to address these problems.

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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

KAREN KONING ABUZAYD, Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), introducing the UNRWA's report, said that the past year had witnessed major changes, which would have a significant impact on prospects for the region. While Palestinians had mourned the death in November 2004 of their leader, Yasser Arafat, the international community had been encouraged by the smooth transition of power to his successor through free and fair elections in January 2005. She said the UNRWA continued to enjoy excellent working relations with the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, who had emphasized that the disengagement from the Gaza Strip had not changed the status of the Palestine refugees within the Strip.

She said the UNRWA had been working closely with James Wolfensohn, Special Envoy for Disengagement (of the Quarter's), to develop ways in which aid could best be channelled to create positive change and economic improvement. The UNRWA had focused, in the immediate term, on microcredit, job creation and reconstruction of demolished houses. Additionally, the Agency had raised almost \$50 million to date and was poised to expand its activities wherever extra funds were made available. She stressed the need for economic openings and freer movement of people and goods. Without employment opportunities, open borders and access to the West Bank, there could only be increasing economic stagnation in Gaza.

While recent attention had focused on Gaza following Israel's disengagement, the construction of the separation barrier was bearing down heavily on the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank, she continued. Many Palestinians had lost access to places of work, education and health care and lands. The barrier made it difficult to reach people in need, affected the UNRWA's daily operations and prevented local staff from reaching their offices or going on field visits. The UNRWA was equally concerned with what appeared to be a resumption of another cycle of violence and counter-violence that could easily destroy important progress made so far. Extra-judicial killings by the Israeli military and the firing of "kassam" rockets into Israel were the most visible aspects of this violence.

Until there was a "post-disengagement take-off", she said, the UNRWA's emergency programme remained a vital safety net to refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In the light of disengagement, and hopes of getting people back to work, the UNRWA had reduced its emergency appeal by half for 2006, but she now feared that emergency aid may be required for some time to come. In the Gaza Strip, the euphoria over the withdrawal of the Israeli army and the settlers was almost over. While the internal restriction of movement within the Gaza Strip had been removed, 1.3 million Palestinians found themselves trapped in an area with no link with the West Bank, access to Israel or an opening to the outside world. She was hopeful that the news this morning of agreement on the opening of the Rafah crossing boded well for the many other decisions on border crossings and links with the outside world, which were awaiting final decisions.

She said she believed the Agency's achievements of recent years were quite remarkable. This was particularly so when considering the conditions under which it had been operating and the skeleton managerial staff and limited resources with which it had had to cope. The tasks of the UNRWA were growing, and the Agency must keep up with host country standards. It must address increasingly complex needs caused by conflict; provide ever more sophisticated technical training; adjust to the changing health profile of the refugees and improve the capacity to assess needs and to respond to them.

Substantive improvements would require operational changes, which in turn required additional resources, she said. The UNRWA would have the capacity to deliver and to improve services and living conditions for the refugees only if it received the resources it was requesting in its needs-based biennium budget for 2006-2007.

HANS JACOB FRYDENLUND (Norway) Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of the UNRWA, introducing the Group's report, said that even though the Agency's financial balance had improved over the past four years, the underlying problem remained, namely the gap between the assessed needs and the available funds.

Summarizing the report's observations, he said that in view of the continuing humanitarian difficulties in the occupied Palestinian territory, and the absence of any turnaround in high rates of poverty and unemployment in the near future, the Group recognized the need for certain elements of the UNRWA's emergency interventions to continue in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Agency played a vital role in preserving the region's stability and security.

He said the improvement in the UNRWA's financial situation was a welcome development, but contributions would have to be sustained and substantially increased to meet the requirements of the 2006-2007 budget. Member States were urged to maintain high levels of contributions, increase their contribution or start contributing to the UNRWA.

Interactive Dialogue

Answering a question from the representative of Egypt regarding expansion of the Advisory Commission, Ms. ABUZAYD said the intention of such an expansion was not to get additional financing from new members. Rather, the idea was to engage the countries already on the ground with the UNRWA, and to benefit from their advice. The Advisory Commission now met once a year, while a larger advisory Committee of some 20 members instead of the current 11, should be able to have subcommittees and expand contributions.

General Debate

RIYAD MANSOUR, Observer for Palestine, said the plight of the refugees would continue to be of paramount importance until their natural and inherent right to return to their homes and properties was recognized. It was regrettable that the situation of the more than 4 million refugees remained as critical today as 57 years ago. Assembly resolution [194 \(III\)](#) of 1948 stipulated that "the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practical date, and compensation should be paid for property of those choosing not to return and for loss or damage to property". The rights of those Palestinians displaced in 1967 had been affirmed in Security Council resolution [237 \(1967\)](#).

He said that Israel, the occupying Power, had for decades obstructed the resolution of that crisis by denying over four generations of Palestine refugees their basic rights. Israel continued to refuse to acknowledge any responsibility for the plight of the refugees and remained locked in position contrary to international law. Over the past five years, the suffering of the Palestine refugees had been compounded by the excessive and indiscriminate violence, and the systematic human rights violations, committed by the Israeli occupying forces, which had persisted in targeting and terrorizing the camps, in particular Rafah and Jabaliya. Another issue that continued to place great strain on the refugee population was the continued imposition of restrictions on the freedom of movement of Palestinian persons and goods. Moreover, Israel's ongoing unlawful construction of the Wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, had further isolated and impoverished hundreds of refugee families.

He said the dismantling of illegal Israeli settlements and the withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank had been important steps towards reversing the Israeli colonization of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967. The Israeli disengagement, however, had been unilaterally planned and implemented, and had failed to recognize any Palestinian concerns. Hopefully, the disengagement would provide constructive momentum towards an improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the Palestinian refugees in Gaza. For that to happen, Israel must resolve all remaining issues, including lifting restrictions on freedom of movement and removal of military sieges and closures. Also, the occupying Power must cease its construction of the Wall and heed the [Advisory Opinion](#) of the International Court of Justice. Israeli disengagement did not change the legal status of Gaza as occupied territory.

The UNRWA had continued to overcome financial challenges by pursuing innovative ways to raise funding, including focusing on Arab donors and establishing independent country support groups, he said emphasizing that the international community's continued financial support of the UNRWA was as vital as its continued political support, pending a just and lasting resolution of the Palestine refugee problem. Expansion of the Advisory Commission was a clear indication of the importance placed by the international community on the Agency's work. Despite all the challenges and obstacles, the UNRWA had been able to carry out its mission effectively owing to the dedication of its entire staff and the steadfast support of the international community.

MOHAMMED SAEED ALMANEI (United Arab Emirates) said that although more than 58 years had passed since the start of the Palestine question, the conditions of the Palestinian population had worsened year after year, due to the continuation of occupation, the confiscation of Palestinian lands, and the practices of extreme violence and collective punishment. The situation had worsened after the construction of the Separation Wall, which had resulted in the destruction of thousands of acres of Palestinian lands and displaced thousands of Palestinians.

The Palestinian refugees and their camps were not the only targets of such violations and practices, he said. The UNRWA operations and the movement of its staff in the occupied territories were also impeded and interrupted according to the field reports submitted by the Agency. Recent reports had referred to various matters, including the continued building of the Separation Wall inside the West Bank, which had resulted in the isolation and impoverishment of Palestinian living in the adjacent areas, especially families who lived in the area between the wall and the truce line of 1949.

While the United Arab Emirates delegation appreciated the Agency's efforts to improve living conditions for the refugees, it was still concerned about the extreme conditions of deprivation and unemployment in some refugee camps due to the imposition of local laws. The United Arab Emirates delegation was also alarmed about the insufficient financial resources available to the Agency and the adverse impact of that on its infrastructure and ability to execute its development programmes.

HARON HASSAN (Jordan) said his country hosted approximately 1.8 million Palestinian refugees registered with the UNRWA. In 2005 alone the Government of Jordan had spent more than US \$463 million in providing educational services, health care and social welfare, and it continued to provide assistance year after year, despite the financial difficulties it continued to face and its limited resources. The Government also covered the cost of any additional burdens that might arise from a decrease in the UNRWA services due to the Agency's budgetary deficit.

The UNRWA should continue to operate in the region until a final solution to the refugee problem was agreed upon by all concerned parties and implemented in all its aspects, he said. Until then the UNRWA's role should be enhanced and its continued operation guaranteed. The Agency had proved vital assistance over the years, both to the Palestinian refugees and to the host countries. Jordan called on all donor countries to continue paying their contributions to the UNRWA's budget. There should be no categorization of Palestinian refugees on the basis of the geographic location where they were hosted or the status of their living conditions. The refugee problem was one and the same for all concerned parties and should be treated as such.

HAYDAR ALI AHMAD (Syria) said millions of Palestine refugees suffered due to Israel's refusal to let them return to their homeland. Fifty-seven years had passed since one of the greatest tragedies in the Middle East. The end of that tragedy was not in sight, as housing was being destroyed and families displaced. Despite repeated appeals to Israel by the international community to respect international humanitarian law that banned the killing of civilians, Israel continued to ignore United Nations resolutions and to construct the Separation Wall in violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Israeli practices also hampered the work of the UNRWA as its vehicles often had been prevented from passing check points.

He said the Syrian Government, as a host State to refugees, had provided all possible assistance to Palestinians living on its territory. It coordinated its work with the UNRWA and carried the financial burden to ensure the Palestinians a life of dignity until their return home. The responsibility for the refugees was an international one. It was necessary for the UNRWA to continue its work, and its services had to be provided in the five official areas without discrimination. The international community should provide the necessary financial support.

The UNRWA's working conditions were extremely precarious, he said. Some staff had lost their lives after being targeted by Israel and should be provided with risk coverage. Resolution 194 (III) stipulated the rights of Palestinian refugees to return, and subsequent resolutions established a link to the right to return and to self-determination, which was not possible without the right to return. Since September 2000, Israel had killed more than 3,000 Palestinians, and it was time the international community exerted pressure on Israel to implement resolution 194 (III).

MONAJUUL (Norway) said that the UNRWA played a vital role in preserving the stability and security of the region. The regular services it provided had given a growing refugee population relief and hope of a life in dignity, and Norway commended the Agency and its staff for their untiring efforts to assist Palestinian refugees under difficult and often dangerous circumstances.

The Gaza disengagement had raised expectations of an improvement in the quality of life for the Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank, she said. The donor community was mobilizing resources in response to the high rates of poverty and unemployment. Norway commended the UNRWA for taking a leading role in areas of immediate concern, such as job creation, reconstruction of destroyed homes and community development.

She said the UNRWA must be given the capacity and resources it needed to carry out a regional mandate assigned by the General Assembly. Her delegation urged fellow donors to contribute to the Agency's general budget, and to respond to the emergency appeals. The Agency, donors and host countries had a common interest in ensuring that scarce resources were used efficiently. This required transparency and dialogue between the UNRWA and host authorities regarding policy priorities. As a donor, Norway was concerned that the cost of providing humanitarian goods had risen sharply, because of port and related charges imposed on imports through Israel. The cost of providing basic services to the refugee population in the occupied territories had also increased as a result of Israeli Defence Force closures and the construction of the barrier. Her delegation called upon Israel to facilitate the speedy delivery of all the UNRWA services.

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Continuation of General Debate

ABEL LAROSA (Cuba) said that the hostile attitude of the Government of Israel made it extremely difficult for the UNRWA to carry out its functions. What was the benefit of building 402 new houses and repairing another 339 if the destructive fury of Israeli bulldozers had driven 16,000 Palestinians out of their homes during the same period? The UNRWA's report clearly reflected the hostile environment in which the Agency had been working. The warning shots at its vehicles and mistreatment of its staff, including detentions, were part of the shameful record surrounding the actions of the Israeli authorities.

The recent unilateral withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip and the evacuation of Jewish settlements in that area should not produce confusion, he continued. The international community should not think that was the beginning of the end of Israel's genocidal policy in the area, or the road to a definitive solution to the question of Palestine. Israel continued to build the illegal Separation Wall, depriving the future Palestinian State of cultivable land and leaving 20,000 Palestinians without livelihood or personal assets. It had also destroyed thousands of hectares of land, as well as water wells in the West Bank, and deprived Palestinian communities of vital primary services like education, health care and employment.

He said that while his delegation noted with satisfaction the good management of the Agency budget, nevertheless, it was a matter of concern that the current year might close with a deficit. Cuba lent its support to the UNRWA's appeal to maintain and increase the contributions and resources in order to face the current challenges.

KAIS KABTANI (Tunisia) said the suffering of the Palestine refugees had persisted for more than half a century. In addition to the endless cycle of violence, the Israeli occupying authorities had continued with the closures, prevention of movement and destruction of property that had caused tragedies going beyond the UNRWA'S capacities. The international community should act urgently to force the Israeli government to stop targeting Palestinian civilians.

He said the UNRWA's financial situation was still a cause of concern and appealed to donor countries to increase their contributions, expressing the hope that expanding the Advisory Committee's membership would result in generous contributions to the Agency's budget. Hopefully the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip would lead to an alleviation of the restrictions placed on the refugees, particularly the restrictions on movement. Regrettably, the news about escalating violence was alarming.

In conclusion, he expressed appreciation for the important contributions made by the host countries sheltering the refugees, which had resulted in heavy financial burdens. A lasting solution to the Palestinian question should include the right of return for refugees and the right of compensation, as stipulated in Assembly resolution 194 (II).

ALI HAWADAH (Kuwait) expressed gratitude and admiration for the UNRWA's continued provision of health, education and assistance to the Palestinian people, and stressed the importance of its international responsibility to provide all the necessary services until the Palestinian problem was settled. Kuwait understood that financial difficulties were hindering the UNRWA's work, and hoped that the Agency would be able to secure the necessary resources to continue providing services and expanding its work, which should continue in all five operational areas without discrimination.

He said his country had always provided economic resources to the Palestinian community and would continue to support the UNRWA by contributing to the regular budget. The Palestinian cause was just and should be resolved according to international resolutions. Since September 2000 the Israeli Government had continued its military aggression, arrests and killings in violation of the basic principles of international law, under the guise of preserving national security. However, events had shown that such policies caused an escalation of violence. The Israeli authorities continued to hamper the UNRWA's humanitarian work by arresting its staff illegally. Those practices must stop, and Israel must fulfil the provisions of international law.

ANDREA SEMADENI (Switzerland) said that the services that the UNRWA provided could not have been developed without the institutional strength and the supportive infrastructure of the host countries. Switzerland endorsed the renewed dialogue and measures recently implemented in Lebanon aimed at improving the socio-economic situation of the Palestine refugees there. In the occupied Palestinian territories, the UNRWA continued to work in an extremely difficult environment, including restrictions on movement and security concerns. The international community must, therefore, continue to call on Israel — whose right to protect its population was fully recognized — to comply with international humanitarian law and facilitate at all times access by the Palestinian population and registered refugees to humanitarian services.

He said that the plight of the refugees in the occupied Palestinian territories was sadly illustrated by the joint study of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNRWA, which had found that 1.4 million Palestinian in the West Bank and Gaza did not have food security. The significant increase in the incidence of vulnerable households headed by women indicated that poverty among the refugees was being feminized. Hopefully, a sustained improvement in the overall security situation and positive developments regarding economic recovery in the Occupied Palestinian Territory would enable the UNRWA to wind down its emergency operations and concentrate more on implementing its main programmes.

Switzerland had organized, with the UNRWA, the Geneva Conference "Meeting the Needs of Palestine Refugees in the Near East: Building Partnership in Support of UNRWA", which had dealt with such important issues as expanding the membership of the Advisory Commission, launching a comprehensive data collection programme, adopting measures to improve management, and further developing and facilitating partnerships and synergies within the global humanitarian community.

HEIDI HULAN (Canada) said that Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank this year had opened new opportunities to improve the lives of the Palestinian people and to renew efforts on the Roadmap. Canada recognized the work that had to be done to maximize those opportunities, and in that context, Prime Minister Martin had committed to enhancing Canada's engagement with and support to the Palestinian Authority during the present crucial time.

The UNRWA's role in humanitarian relief and the provision of essential services to Palestinians in the education, health and social welfare sectors remained of vital importance, she said. Recognizing that, in addition to a contribution of \$10 million to the UNRWA's core budget, Prime Minister Martin had announced in September a further \$6 million contribution to the agency's job creation and microcredit lending initiatives in Gaza. The current situation should open up opportunities for a new level of partnership between the UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority in the planning and programming of new services. That was a priority for Canada, as it was for other donors, and it was prepared to help facilitate that partnership.

TAREK ADEL (Egypt) said that Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip had not brought about an improvement in the lot of the Palestinian refugees, who were seeing their hopes fade away. The outrages committed by the Israeli authorities, including curfews and the imposition of various controls, were making their situation more difficult. Restrictions placed on the UNRWA staff were preventing them from carrying out their duties in providing humanitarian assistance. Seventy per cent of the Palestinian people were living below the poverty level, and the situation had only grown worse. The report reflected in stark terms the way in which the UNRWA staff had been targeted through attacks and imprisonment, making it impossible for them to do their jobs.

The building of the Separation Wall had further worsened the situation for the Palestinians, he said. The construction was illegal and must be stopped. What had already been built must be dismantled. Egypt was also concerned about the drop in donations to the Agency, which made it difficult for it to carry out its mandate. In that context, the Egyptian delegation welcomed the expansion of the Advisory Committee's membership and hoped that would expand the flow of resources to support the UNRWA.

CELESTINO MIGLIORE (Holy See) called attention to the growing difficulties faced by Palestinian Christians who, although they belonged to a faith born in that very land, were sometimes viewed with suspicion by their neighbours. Doubly discriminated against, it was hardly surprising that such a tiny group — less than 2 per cent of the local Palestinian population — was particularly marginalized. All Palestinians had the right to fair treatment from their peers and from the recognized authorities alike. Religious extremism of any kind, implicated in attacks, abuse and harassment of Christians in the area around Bethlehem recently, was not to be tolerated. The Holy See hoped, therefore, that solutions would be found by local leaderships to address the needs of all members of local communities who suffered violence.

Of continuing concern was the Security Wall, which cut access to some Palestinian lands and water sources, as well as to employment, commerce, education, medical care and freedom of worship, he continued. The Holy See freely acknowledged the right of all peoples to live in peace and security, but, on the other hand, the Holy Land was in greater need of bridges than of walls.

In the hope that the region's many problems would be resolved by negotiation and dialogue, the Holy See underlined that a lasting solution should include the question of the Holy City of Jerusalem, he said. The time was long overdue for fraternal, open dialogue in order to bring about the birth of two States, living side by side, and mutually respecting each other's right to exist and prosper. Only with a just and lasting peace — not imposed, but secured through negotiation — would the legitimate aspirations of all the peoples of the Holy Land be fulfilled.

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