
UNRWA, UNICEF LAUNCH CHILDREN'S SPORTS PROGRAMME IN LEBANON

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UNRWA AND UNICEF LEBANON LAUNCH PALESTINIADI SPORTS PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN

UNRWA, in partnership with UNICEF, has launched Palestiniadi, a three-day sports event for children and youth in Palestine refugee camps and gatherings in Lebanon. In its seventh year, Palestiniadi brings together more than 300 Palestine refugee children from Lebanon, Palestine refugees from Syria in Lebanon and Lebanese children to compete in six different sports activities. Around 60 children with disabilities are among the participants.

The opening ceremony at the UNRWA Sibliin Training Centre in Saida, southern Lebanon, was attended by Director of UNRWA Affairs in Lebanon Matthias Schmale, the Acting Representative of UNICEF Lebanon, Luciano Caestini, the Consul of the Embassy of Palestine in Lebanon, Ramzi Mansour, the communication advisor of the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, Lina Hamdan, the Mayor of Sibliin, Mohammad Kobar and representatives of the Palestinian factions and leadership in Lebanon.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Mr. Caestini said: "UNICEF supports this annual sports programme, as it provides children and youth from Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese backgrounds with an opportunity to develop their self-esteem and skills and to build bridges among each other. The event is inclusive, encouraging children with disabilities to participate and exercise their rights."

Mr. Schmale, noted that: "Sport is an effective tool in building bridges between different communities and groups. As such, the Palestiniadi has all the components necessary to break down barriers and bring about social change." Mr. Schmale thanked UNICEF for its continuous support to UNRWA and to Palestine refugees, and wished the contestants good luck and enjoyable time.

Mrs. Hamdan, stated that: "The Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, working under the Prime Minister's supervision and with the support of the Government of Lebanon, contributed to various activities: supporting and removing various hurdles impeding progress in more than one file and on more than one level."

In addition to the generous UNICEF support, the event would not have been possible without the support of local UNRWA partners, namely, Palestinian Boys Scouts, Girl Guides Association, Human Call Association, Ghassan Kanafani Foundation, Abu Jihad Al Wazir Foundation, and the Al -Sununu choir.

Palestiniadi will take place between 24 and 26 April in Sibliin Training Centre in Saida and will include six different games: football, table tennis, running, volleyball, basketball and chess. The event will be concluded on Sunday 26 April, when medals will be distributed to the winners and participants in the various competitions.

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As one of UNRWA largest partners, UNICEF has provided nearly US\$ 7 million in cash and in-kind contributions for Palestine refugee children in Lebanon since 2013 for education, health, protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation, as well as water and sanitation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA's services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

Financial support to UNRWA has not kept pace with an increased demand for services caused by growing numbers of registered refugees, expanding need, and deepening poverty. As a result, the Agency's General Fund (GF), supporting UNRWA's core activities and 97 per cent reliant on voluntary contributions, has begun each year with a large projected deficit. Currently the deficit stands at US\$ 100 million.

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