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PALESTINE REFUGEES 'CONTEMPORARY SYMBOL' OF DIFFICULTIES OF PEACEMAKING,

HIGH COST OF FAILURES, HEAD OF UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AGENCY

TELLS FOURTH COMMITTEE

Efforts Intensify as Palestine Refugee Camps in Syria Become Battlegrounds, Financial Resources Continue to Dwindle

Palestine refugees were living proof of a conflict unresolved across generations and a contemporary symbol of the difficulties of peacemaking and the high cost of its failures, the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) heard today as it began its consideration of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Along the way, said UNRWA's Commissioner-General, Filippo Grandi, as he briefed the Committee, the refugees had become part of "one of the largest human displacement disasters of modern times" as they found themselves entangled in conflicts to which they were stranger such as the violence in Syria.

Six out of twelve Palestinian refugee camps in Syria had become battlegrounds between armed opposition groups and Government forces, he said. Driven by "the growing feeling of being increasingly unwelcome in the region", Palestinians were leaving Syria to seek refuge elsewhere.

He said that, in the Gaza Strip, where the Agency alone was providing food to more than 800,000 people, the economy was moribund. In the West Bank, forced displacement through settlement expansion, increased settler violence and home demolitions remained a major concern.

Even as the refugee problem grew, UNRWA was facing a \$48 million cash deficit, which would prevent it from paying the December salaries of teachers, medical personnel, social workers and other staff. Along with that, weakening the Agency now would threaten the new and fragile opportunity for progress in the long-dormant Middle East peace process.

Underscoring the financial crisis that was looming over the Agency, Meena Syed, the Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, said that unless promptly addressed, the situation would render the Agency ineffective. The Agency's working capital was now virtually exhausted. Compounding that, UNRWA's difficulties were not only financial but also political, among which were restrictions by the Israeli Government on the movement of people and goods.

The observer for the State of Palestine said it was difficult to imagine how the Palestine refugees would cope without UNRWA. They had been forced to flee again, due to the crisis in Syria. The Agency was a stabilizing factor in a region where conflict after conflict had increased the vulnerability of the Palestinian refugees, she said.

Speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the representative of Iran said many in the region lauded the Agency for its remarkable contributions despite regional instability and the dire financial situation. Israel's military raids, settlement campaign and other illegal practices also endangered the refugees and hampered UNRWA's work. The Syrian crisis had added to that burden.

Thanks to UNRWA, said the representative of Lebanon, refugees from Palestine were provided with basic services that helped them to regain "a sense of normalcy" in host countries. Lebanon had been working

closely with the Agency in the 12 camps on its territory. While it consistently disassociated itself from the Syrian crisis, it had not shunned the increasing influx of refugees from that country. UNRWA now had to manage an exponential increase of almost 20 per cent in refugees.

Syria was not only hosting refugees, the representative of that country countered, but was one of the prime donors and had continued its support services despite the conflict. Its aid had reached \$121 million during the first half of this year. However, the sanctions placed on Syria were affecting, not only Syrians, but also the refugees, preventing their return. His country, he said, had resisted "any attempts to expose refugees to the problems in Syria."

UNRWA's financial situation drew the attention of delegations from outside the region as well. The representative of Japan said his country's history of assistance to the Agency had started in 1953 with its total financial contributions tripling from \$8.7 million in fiscal 2009 to \$27 million in fiscal 2012. Next week, Japan would be announcing a "significant" amount of food aid, which would be used to purchase flour and other commodities for the 300,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

The representative of the European Union said that its member States remained the largest provider of international assistance to Palestine refugees, contributing 52 per cent of all donor support to UNRWA's regular budget and 38 per cent of all contributions to the Agency's operations. However, he stressed that the Union could not address the Agency's financial challenges by itself and with that, he encouraged other donors to "share the burden".

The Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine participated in an interactive dialogue with UNRWA's Commissioner-General.

The representatives of Iceland, South Africa, Senegal, Switzerland, Tunisia and Cuba spoke during the debate.

The representative of Israel spoke in exercise of the right of reply.

The Committee will meet again at 10 a.m. tomorrow, 7 November, to conclude its consideration of UNRWA.

Background

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) met this afternoon to begin its consideration of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for which it had before it the report of the Commissioner-General (document [A/68/13](#)) and the Agency's Programme budget for 2014-2015 (document [A/68/13/Add.1](#)); the report of the Working Group on UNRWA's financing (document [A/68/388](#)); and the report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (document [A/68/335](#)).

Also before the Committee were the reports of the Secretary-General on Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities (document [A/68/347](#)) and on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues (document [A/68/343](#)).

Briefing

FILIPPO GRANDI, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, said that "Palestine refugees continued to be living proof of a conflict unresolved across generations," one that, perhaps more than any other, had become the contemporary symbol of how difficult peacemaking could be and how costly its failures. Furthermore, Palestine refugees had found themselves entangled in other conflicts to which they were strangers. Today, not only did more than half of the Palestinian refugees remain subjected to Israeli occupation in the Palestinian Territory, but many were also enduring the maelstrom of violence in Syria and had become part of one of the largest human displacement disasters of modern times.

The international community's commitment to the well-being of Palestine refugees as enshrined in United Nations resolutions, he added, required that the Agency be well-funded. Its chronic funding shortfalls were exacerbating the refugees' fear of abandonment. While UNRWA had succeeded in maintaining core services, such as education and health, shortage of humanitarian funds in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon had caused a reduction of the support provided, leading to protests and demonstrations. Was there any hope? he asked.

There was a "new, if fragile, opportunity" for progress to be made in the long-dormant Middle East peace process, he went on. Without a positive outcome to all final status issues, the full realization of Palestinian statehood on the ground would remain in abeyance and the refugee situation would remain in limbo. It was "a

moment of promise and uncertainty”, and, therefore, weakening UNRWA now would be interpreted in the region as an attempt to short-circuit peace negotiations through de facto abdication of responsibilities towards refugees.

Although Syria was everybody’s most acute preoccupation, the situation in Gaza was equally concerning, he added. The economy there was moribund, with recent United Nations data showing that food-insecure households had increased from 44 per cent to 57 per cent last year. The Agency alone was providing food to more than 800,000 people, which constituted half the population. Meanwhile, the illegal blockade on Gaza, including the blanket prevention of exports, had crippled the economy. With a 2014 funding outlook that was more challenging than 2013, he feared humanitarian operations in Gaza would not be sustained at adequate levels.

Turning to the West Bank, he said that the security and economic situation there, including in East Jerusalem, was also deteriorating, and Palestinians, among whom nearly 750,000 were refugees, remained alienated from their rights and land by stifling restrictions imposed by the Government of Israel and by the inexorable and illegal growth of settlements. Forced displacement through settlement expansion, home demolitions, restrictions on Palestinian communities and increased settler violence remained a major concern.

Amid the multiplicity of challenges to be addressed regarding the Syrian crisis, the Palestinian refugee component must not be forgotten, he cautioned. The nearly 550,000 Palestine refugees registered in Syria needed emergency assistance, including those who had sought safety in Lebanon and other countries. That number would rise as thousands of refugees, who were previously self-sufficient, continued to approach the Agency to seek support. Six out of twelve Palestinian refugee camps had become battlegrounds between armed opposition groups and Government forces. Those responsible for transforming Palestinian camps and areas into war zones must cease their actions immediately, he stressed.

He said that while there was progress on issues such as destruction of chemical weapons, the plight of civilians had worsened, with humanitarian workers increasingly exposed to the dangers of operating in the middle of a “messy deadly war”. The Agency had lost eight of its staff and 19 were missing. Around 46,000 Palestine refugee homes were estimated to have been damaged or destroyed. Yet, UNRWA continued to work in Syria, adapting constantly. The health and education services that it provided was sustaining families, keeping support systems functioning and holding communities together. Cash distribution and the distribution of simple but essential items such as hygiene kits and warm clothes were alleviating the immediate vulnerability of the displaced.

Thanking Member States who had stepped up and financed UNRWA’s activities, he added that he anticipated a 25 per cent increase in funding requirements in 2014. Many Palestinians had left Syria to seek refuge elsewhere. “There were Palestinians from Syria on boats, which sank off the coasts of Egypt and Malta last month.” The enormous risk they had been forced to take was a “heartbreaking reminder of the growing vulnerability and of their feeling of being increasingly unwelcome in the region”.

In Lebanon, he said, the influx of Palestinians from Syria, amid a huge flow of Syrian refugees, had compounded the already overcrowded Palestinian camps. A priority for the Agency in Lebanon was to complete the reconstruction of Nahr El Bared Camp, which had been totally destroyed in 2007, leaving 27,000 refugees homeless. Jordan was the most stable field of operations of UNRWA, hosting the largest number of Palestine refugees and hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. Its “hospitality and burden” must be appreciated.

UNRWA today, he said, had a \$48 million cash deficit, which would prevent it from paying the salaries of teachers, medical personnel, social workers and other staff in December, bringing its operations to a standstill. During his term as Commissioner-General, he had pursued the avenue of expanding the Agency’s donor base. Some countries, especially Brazil and Turkey, had substantially increased their contributions. At a ministerial level meeting in New York held in September, he had emphasized the need for further support for the Agency’s core services, notably from members of the Arab League who were already, especially Saudi Arabia, among the largest donors to the special projects.

Meanwhile, UNRWA had also pursued a vigorous reform agenda, he added, with half of its health centres adopting e-health tools and educational reforms advancing with a focus on inclusive education, teacher development and conflict resolution teaching. The Agency was also developing a new approach to dealing with poverty, which would focus on the abject poor and aim to interrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Noting that the current briefing would likely be his last appearance before the Committee as UNRWA’s Commissioner-General, he paid homage to those who had lost their lives in service to UNRWA. The Agency, he added, had managed to execute its mandate to provide the essential education, health and other services to Palestine refugees. It would have liked to have done better and to have met more needs comprehensively, but that had proven difficult in those lean economic times. Throughout his time at the Agency, he had been humbled by the spirit, resilience and determination of the Palestinian people, and those qualities needed to find an expression in the State of Palestine, living in peace and security with its neighbours.

Interactive Dialogue

In a brief discussion that followed, RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, commended the Commissioner-General for his contributions over the past eight years, saying he had been “a good friend to our people”. Given UNRWA’s shortfall of \$48 million and that no possibilities had emerged to address that, thereby risking its ability to pay its workers and ensure the refugees’ security, he asked what steps it and other States had taken to address that? And, also, what was the Agency’s recommendations to revive the economy in Gaza and improve the refugees’ situation there?

Regarding the \$48 million shortfall, the Agency’s overall expenditure had been reduced without reducing basic services. Mr. GRANDI shared the Observer’s concerns that services were already limited. He highlighted the Agency’s September meeting in New York with all Arab League member States and Palestine’s other largest contributors. The League’s countries sought to achieve the 7.8 per cent target for Arab Government contributions to UNRWA’s core budget. However, the Agency urgently requested more regular contributions from the League, he said, noting that the Secretary-General had been “travelling across the world to assess the possibility of other donors”. The problem might have been regional but had a “global impact” on the well-being of other countries, he added.

He discussed the effects of UNRWA’s decreasing services on Gaza, including in such areas as food and cash distributions. Its ability to continue job programmes had also diminished. The cost of such services was already at \$117 million, and in 2014, the Agency would only see an income of \$94 million. It had made an additional appeal to donor States and consolidated its appeal to existing donors, such as Turkey and Brazil, which had recently contributed food assistance. Having been with the Agency for eight years, he said, he had an “awareness of impacts of Israel and recently the state of Egypt” on the continued distributions to Gaza. He had called on Israel to “relax the blockage”, but in recent years, he had seen more restrictions. He hoped that was temporary, owing to security concerns. The blockages were part of what was “stifling” Gaza and making it dependent on refugee support, he said.

Introduction of Report

MEENA SYED (Norway), Rapporteur, Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, introduced the Group’s report, saying that, as in previous years, the Agency’s financial situation was developing into a fully fledged crisis. She asked all in the international community to help remedy the problem, as unless promptly addressed, the Agency could become ineffective in providing basic services to the refugees. The shortfall face was \$48 million by the end of the year, and without coverage, UNRWA would not be able to fund the December payroll of its staff. As the refugee population continued to grow, the cost of maintaining, not even improving, services in a region torn by unrest was also growing. UNRWA had entered 2013 with a working capital deficit, and that capital was virtually exhausted.

The Agency, she added, had renewed its appeals to donors to fully fund the core budget as well as to cover the deficit. The Working Group had been made aware of a special meeting of a group of supporters of the Agency that had taken place on the margins of the 2013 general debate; hopefully, pledges would follow. UNRWA had also been widening its donor base to include non-traditional funding sources. The Working Group called for early and complete fulfilment of outstanding donor pledges; early payment and multi-year funding commitments were crucial.

UNRWA, she continued, faced not only financial difficulties but also political challenges, including restrictions on the movement of people and goods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Working Group called upon the Israeli Government to provide free and unfettered access and to further open crossings into Gaza, consistent with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The Working Group’s report also describes the costly operational challenges to the Agency as a result of the blockade. Access difficulties in the West Bank and settler violence further challenged the Agency.

The Working Group’s attention was also drawn to the consequences of the catastrophic conflict in Syria and its impacts on the Agency and the Palestine refugees, she said. With enormous internal displacements and immense operational difficulties, the Working Group called on the international community to fully fund the UNRWA Syria Response Plan. It also called on all parties to the conflict to preserve the neutrality of the camps and the security of the Palestine refugees in Syria. She urged all Governments to raise their level of support to the Agency. The continued commitment of the international community to the Palestine refugees remained essential in the absence of a just and durable solution.

Statements

FEDA ABDELHADY-NASSER, observer for the State of Palestine, said the Palestine refugees numbered more than 5 million people and remained at the core of a comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine. Millions still lived in the camps set up more than 60 years ago. Since May 1950, UNRWA had embodied the worldwide responsibility to act collectively, in accordance with international law and principles of

justice, to alleviate that “human tragedy” and contribute to its just solution. Palestine affirmed the right of the refugees to return to their State and receive just compensation for their losses. Those displaced in the June 1967 hostilities had the right to return to their homes and lands in line with United Nations resolutions agreed two decades ago.

That massive violation of the innate rights of the Palestine refugees, she said, had left them dispossessed and acutely vulnerable to the crises and conflicts wracking the region over decades. She drew attention to several such events, among them the 2008-2009 and 2012 Israeli military occupation against the Gaza strip; the 2007 destruction of the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon; and the traumatic impact of the conflict in Syria of the Palestine refugees. In addition, refugee communities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip suffered from the impact of illegal Israeli policies and measures.

The Agency’s ability to efficiently deliver aid was impaired, owing to persistent access problems — particularly in areas between the wall and the Green Line — in addition to continuing attacks on its personnel, she said. The blockade of Gaza delayed the repair of dilapidated infrastructure, affecting the provision of water, sanitation, electricity and other services. Israeli restrictions also impacted the Agency’s provision of education and health care, as its facilities in Gaza were inadequate to meet demands and forced undue financial costs on the Agency. She called for an end to all of those “illegal Israeli policies”.

The tragic conflict in Syria impacted nearly the entire Palestine refugee community there, she went on. Once again, they had been forced to flee, mostly to Lebanon and Jordan, and had endured the loss of life, injury, loss of shelters, further displacement and loss of livelihoods. Eighty-seven percent of the Palestine refugees at the Nahr el-Bared camp remained displaced, and while she commended the Agency’s efforts to rebuild the camp, continued donor support was needed for that “crucial” project.

She said it was difficult to imagine how the Palestine refugees would cope without UNRWA, particularly the youth, to whom the Agency gave opportunity and support; the abject poor whose subsistence it ensured; the most vulnerable whom it protected; and those in dire need of emergency support during times of upheaval. “The Agency constituted a stabilizing factor in the region,” and it should thus be fully supported — politically and financially — including through renewal of its mandate by the General Assembly this year. She reiterated Palestine’s appeal to donors to strengthen their support of the Agency and allow it to keep on providing assistance to the refugees commensurate with their needs.

GHOLAMHOSSEIN DEHGHANI (Iran), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that despite increased challenges and instability in the region and UNRWA’s dire financial situation, the Agency was effectively running education programmes for young Palestinian children in more than 58 recognized refugee camps, delivering vital medical services throughout, providing food and immediate relief and social assistance, in particular for the abject poor and disabled, as well as urgent emergency assistance where needed. He reaffirmed that UNRWA’s mandate and role were essential until the achievement of a just and lasting solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees.

The Movement, he said, was gravely concerned over the critical situation of the Palestine refugees living in the camps in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and particularly the Gaza Strip. Their safety was endangered by military raids, and Israel’s illegal settlement colonization campaign. Also having a severe impact was the construction of the wall, home demolitions, imposition of severe movement restrictions and hundreds of checkpoints, detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, among other violations. Such illegal practices also negatively affected UNRWA. Israel, the occupying Power, must cease its breaches of the inviolability of United Nations premises, including of UNRWA, and cease its harassment and obstruction of the movement of the Agency’s personnel.

The international community must uphold its moral, political and legal responsibilities to bring an end to Israel’s illegal policies and violations against the Palestinian people, he said. In addition, the Movement was concerned about the situation of the Palestine refugees in Syria and the hardships and further displacement they were enduring in the prevailing situation, where thousands of Palestine refugees had fled to other countries for safety. The Movement recognized the added demands on UNRWA as a result, particularly the increasing need to provide emergency assistance to affected refugees. The Agency was contending, not only with chronic funding shortfall, but also with acute funding uncertainties induced by economic and political volatility. The Movement welcomed General Assembly resolution 65/272, which requested the Secretary-General to continue to support the institutional strengthening of the Agency through the provision of financial resources from the regular budget of the United Nations.

IOANNIS VRILAS, representing the European Union Delegation, expressed deep appreciation for the invaluable work performed by UNRWA across its five fields of operation, noting that the Agency’s work had become even more challenging in an increasingly unstable context. The Union also expressed its deepest condolences to the families of those UNRWA workers who died in the line of duty in the past few months. The bloc, he said was alarmed by the situation in Syria where the ongoing conflict was taking a tremendous toll on Palestine refugees and UNRWA staff.

On the Agency's financial situation, he said that the European Union's member States remained the largest provider of international assistance to Palestine refugees and its support had enabled UNRWA to achieve key objectives year after year, from pursuing the delivery of cost-effective and efficient public services to sustaining the populations of Gaza, Syria and Lebanon in the most difficult times. To date, and despite profound European budget cuts, the Union's contribution, including that of Member States, represents 52 per cent of all donor support to UNRWA's regular budget and 38 per cent, or nearly \$320 million, of all contributions to the Agency's overall operations.

He said the Union endorsed the conclusions of the Special Group of Supporters of UNRWA's meeting, which noted that the Agency's next medium-term strategy offered an opportunity to further address the sustainability of its core interventions and to ensure that services were concentrated in the areas providing the most value for refugees, in particular the most disadvantaged. With every year, there were growing challenges to the commitments to match UNRWA's growing needs. "Although the Union is committed to UNRWA's mandate, we simply cannot address UNRWA's financial challenges alone," he said, encouraging other donors, including first time contributors, to share the burden.

GRÉTA GUNNARSDÓTTIR (Iceland) expressed her country's appreciation for UNRWA's work in an increasingly difficult situation in all of its five fields of operation, with all now "tangibly" affected by armed conflict or humanitarian situations, "a predicament that UNRWA has not faced in decades". The tragic conflict in Syria, with its unending brutal violence, had intensified the humanitarian needs of Palestine refugees and gravely affected UNRWA's operational environment.

UNRWA estimated that the total number of people in need was rapidly approaching the total population of over half a million refugees registered in Syria, she said, adding that thousands had been forced to leave their homes and had become internally displaced persons. Other Palestine refugees had been forced to leave the country altogether. Those "have to be afforded equal protection to others fleeing the violence in Syria", in line with the presidential statement adopted by the Security Council on 2 October.

As if all the challenges arising from the region's crisis were not enough, UNRWA's situation was also financially unsustainable, she said. It was never meant to be permanent, but it would continue to be "badly needed" until a just and lasting solution was found for the refugees. The international community must make every effort to honour its responsibilities towards the refugees. Her Government would continue to support UNRWA and hoped that other Member States would do the same, she said, urging those Member States not yet donors to seriously consider becoming donors to broaden the Agency's donor base. In that regards, Iceland welcomed the engagement of members of the Arab League to achieve the 7.8 per cent target for Arab Government contributions to UNRWA's core budget.

LINDA MASO (South Africa) regretted that armed conflict had claimed the lives of several of UNRWA's workers and paid tribute to them. The Commissioner-General posited the situation of the Palestine refugees displaced for more than 60 years and underscored the myriad challenges they faced, much of which resulted from the international community's inability to deliver the refugees from the "bondage of occupation". That should compel its members to do everything necessary to free them from that confinement. South Africa was also concerned about the impact of the Syrian situation on UNRWA's ability to deliver, yet despite the shortfall and the situation, the Agency still met the needs of the refugees "particularly where no restrictions on its movements continued".

He called on the international community to contribute further to the Agency and to condemn Israel's monetary charges on the transport of goods across State lines, which affected the businesses of Palestine and impeded its economic development. South Africa added its voice to the need to end the occupation. It urged Member States to contribute more to UNRWA, but said the Agency could only "alleviate the problems created by the occupation"; the solution lay in bringing an end to the occupation of Palestine and the settlement of its lands.

MOTOHIDE YOSHIKAWA (Japan), noting that his country's assistance to Palestinians through UNRWA dated back to 1953, said that his country's total financial contributions to the agency had tripled from \$8.7 million in fiscal 2009 to \$27 million in fiscal 2012. That cooperation had helped UNRWA provide basic services to Palestinian refugees, and further, to conduct emergency humanitarian assistance in response to the Syrian crisis. Japan would announce a "significant" amount of food aid next week, following an exchange of formal notes between his country and UNRWA. That grant would be used to purchase flour and other commodities for some 300,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

He said that Japan was also helping Palestinians create viable economic foundations, citing the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" project, which would transform part of the Jordan Valley into productive land so that agricultural products could be exported. Another initiative — the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development — aimed to mobilize and share East Asian economic development experiences and resources with Palestinians. A business promotion meeting would be held in December, with a second meeting of the Conference to take place early next year, under Indonesia's chairmanship.

CHARBEL WEHBI ([Lebanon](#)) said past history had determined that ethnic cleansing should not be repeated, and hence, it was necessary to continue working towards a just and comprehensive solution to the Middle East problems, at the heart of which lay the question of Palestine. He reiterated the role UNRWA played but warned that its financial crisis would undermine its commitments to the refugees. It had been the Agency's priority to help Palestine refugees to "regain a sense of normalcy" in host countries, and Lebanon had been working with it to fulfil its mandate within the 12 camps in the country. It had taken important steps, such as amending its labour legislation and developing a framework to improve the livelihoods of the refugees during their temporary stay in Lebanon.

He said that current regional events, especially the crisis in Syria, had uprooted already displaced refugees, aggravating their volatile situation and forcing them to flee to Lebanon and other neighbouring countries. While Lebanon's stance on Syria's crisis had consistently been disassociation, his country had not distanced itself from its humanitarian obligations and had kept its borders open for refugee influx. The number of Palestine refugees in Lebanon had recently surpassed 75,000, and the Agency had to manage an exponential increase of almost 20 per cent of refugees to that populace. Lebanon urged State donors to immediately supply UNRWA with sound, sustainable and much-needed funding, and it called for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and to the violation of Palestine refugees' inalienable rights.

IBRAHIM AL KHALIL ([Senegal](#)) said that the ups and down of history had forced large numbers of Palestinians to seek refuge in other countries, in particular Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. From 750,000 in 1950 to 5 million today, their number had grown exponentially, making UNRWA's services in education and medical aid absolutely crucial. Senegal welcomed the promising vision guiding the Agency's activities, he said, adding that its far-reaching reforms would improve management and resource mobilization. In the area of health, for instance, the Agency provided key primary health services through 139 centres. The innovative strategy of the Family Health Team programme was vital to meet the health-care needs of the refugees. The Agency was also prioritizing reforms in the fields of education and training of Palestine youth. Yet, despite its key role, UNRWA faced severe financial difficulties causing a reduction in services. The international community should strengthen solidarity on the issue of the Palestine refugees.

IHAB HAMED ([Syria](#)) said the racist occupation of Israel violated the Palestine refugees' right of self-determination, and the United Nations inability to implement its resolution of 1948 had encouraged Israel to continue its expulsion of Palestinians and deny their rights. Syria was not only hosting those refugees, but was one of the prime donor countries and its support services had continued, despite the conflict in its own country, with the amount of that aid reaching \$121 million during the first half of this year. The sanctions placed on Syria by some States had not only affected the Syrian people but also those residents of Syria, and in some cases, prevented the refugees' return and the compensation they received for the dangers imposed by terrorist groups.

He said Syria regretted the loss of lives of Palestinians and Agency workers. It would continue to do its utmost to protect them. Even amid the action of the armed terrorist groups, his country had resisted "any attempts to expose refugees to the problems in Syria". Finally, despite the crimes the Israeli forces committed against the workers, UNRWA had made an effort to return the refugees to safety. If those countries that supported terrorism and financially contributed to Israel reconsidered the funding to the Agency and earmarked even a little of that money to help the cause of the refugees and the situation facing UNRWA, there would be a realistic solution to the problem.

STÉPHANE LAURENT REY ([Switzerland](#)) said the regional environment for UNRWA remained extremely volatile and had deteriorated significantly this year. The Agency played a key role in meeting the Palestine refugees' growing needs, but its precarious financial situation threatened its ability to fulfil its role and could become a destabilizing factor. The Agency, more than ever, required adequate and predictable funding by the United Nations. The under-financing of the General Fund was worrying. Switzerland was committed to biannual financing and was increasing its contribution by 10 per cent. But adequate financing depended on the international community as a whole. The Agency was required to adopt more extensive policies on preparedness and poverty reduction. UNRWA alone could not meet the multiple challenges of protection and assistance in the context of the current crises and of fighting increasing poverty among the Palestine refugees. The speaker encouraged strategic partnerships with the Agency and expected the United Nations system in particular to support it in the execution of its mandate.

RIADH BEN SLIMAN ([Tunisia](#)) said that there was no doubt that the Israeli occupation and the continuing settlements had made the work of UNRWA more difficult at a time of inadequate financial resources and increasing refugee needs. A huge number of Palestine refugees were registered with the Agency in Syria. Statistics indicated that about 420,000 people were in urgent need. His country called on the international community to heed the Agency's appeal to take all measures to avoid serious humanitarian consequences and to observe international legal obligations to protect Palestine refugees. The deterioration of security conditions in Gaza, West Bank and Jerusalem were hindering UNRWA from providing its mandated services. The matter of refugees could not be separated from the Palestine question, and a lasting solution was needed to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and to recover their independent, sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

OSCAR LEÓN GONZÁLEZ(Cuba) said given UNRWA's undertaking to alleviate the terrible situation of the refugees, Cuba believed it was unjustifiable that the Palestinians had suffered further from Israel's "illegal policies". The building of the wall and the continued raising of settlements, as well as the increasing demolitions in Palestine, were inconsistent with international law and had led to an alarming rise in the number of refugees, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, the Israeli blockade and the tax requirement on Palestinian businesses were reprehensible, and Cuba called for the immediate reimbursement of those monies. Furthermore, Israel had refused to protect the Agency's personnel and facilities, which had resulted in attacks on and damage to 77 outposts. UNRWA had been instrumental in helping the Palestinians and, thus, offsetting its financial shortfall was crucial. Cuba urged the international community to meet its pledges and called on States to maintain support for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people for self-determination.

Right of Reply

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply, the representative of Israel said that his country had approved various projects in the Gaza Strip recently, among which, was the transfer of 5 billion cubic metres of water and a sewage treatment project supported by the World Bank. Israel had also significantly increased approvals for the movement of building materials for the private sector. However, the discovery of a concrete tunnel, leading from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory, clearly equipped for terrorism purposes, had caused Israel to suspend those deliveries. He added that Human Rights Watch had documented several violations against Palestinians in Syria, including the execution of 105 victims in detention centres.

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