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STATEMENT

BY

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ON THE AGENDA ITEM 52

“UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR  
PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (UNRWA)”  
(FOURTH COMMITTEE)

AT THE

66TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Madam Chair,

At the outset, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to Mr. Flippo Grandi, Commissioner General of UNRWA for the detailed briefing to the committee on the activities of UNRWA. India commends UNRWA for its work, often carried out under difficult circumstances, over the past six decades in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The humanitarian assistance provided by UNRWA, including education, health care and social services is critical for nearly 5.0 million Palestinian refugees. I also take this opportunity to commend the cooperation of host countries to UNRWA's work.

We also thank the UNRWA Advisory Commission and the members of the working group on the Financing of UNRWA, for their valuable guidance to UNRWA in carrying out its mandate.

Madam Chair,

The services provided by UNRWA are of a critical importance in the context of the continuing uncertainty in the region. The Agency has played a key role in providing humanitarian assistance. Today UNRWA is a symbol of the international community's commitment to the well-being of the Palestinian refugees until a just and durable settlement of the issue is achieved.

The report, and other reports of the UN Secretary-General under consideration of this agenda item, clearly illustrate the severe challenges UNRWA is facing today particularly the increasing funding gap.

The immediate challenge before UNRWA that needs to be addressed is the crisis of financing. The growing budgetary shortfall of UNRWA at a time when there is an increasing demand on UNRWA for assistance and support is a cause for serious concern. Shortage of funds has direct implication on UNRWA work and makes it difficult to maintain the existing level of services. Thousands of Palestinian students who are otherwise eligible cannot make it to UNRWA schools due to lack of class rooms. The people suffering from life threatening diseases are unable to access tertiary care. The quality services have also been affected by the resource crunch and increasing costs.

Therefore, there is a greater need for augmenting international efforts to improve UNRWA's financial health. In this regard, we support the efforts of UNRWA to enhance the donor base. It is important that international community

continues to show commitment to this cause, despite the current difficult global economic situation.

While we note that there has been some improvement in security related restrictions on West Bank and movement of humanitarian supplies and other products into Gaza, restrictions on movement due to separation barrier, closures, and curfews in the Palestinian territories is causing severe hardships to the affected population. The restriction on freedom of movement of UNRWA staff members continues to hinder the work of UNRWA.

In this regard, we support the call of the UNRWA Chairperson regarding removal of restrictions on the movement of agency staff and goods throughout UNRWA's areas of work. In addition, further simplification of the approval process for transportation of humanitarian materials by UNRWA would greatly help the population in need. An early and significant easing of restrictions on movement of goods and people into the Gaza Strip would also greatly help in addressing the dire humanitarian situation there.

We also hope that expeditious implementation of amended Labor Law in Lebanon would be carried out to ensure better employment opportunities for Palestinian refugees.

India on its part has continued its development support to the Palestinian Authority. From the year 2009-10, we enhanced our annual contribution to UNRWA to US\$ 1 million, in addition to a special contribution of US \$ 1 million to UNRWA in response to a flash appeal in 2010. During the last two years, India has also contributed US\$ 10 million annually as untied budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority. We are offering 100 slots to the Palestinian Authority for capacity building and human resource development under our technical and economic cooperation programme. We have also undertaken joint projects with our IBSA partners in Palestine with a sports complex having just been completed. India will continue to do all within its capacities to assist Palestine in its endeavors in capacity and institution-building.

Madam Chair,

It may not be out of place to reiterate India's continued solidarity with the Palestinian people. Speaking a day after President Abbas filed an application for Palestine's membership of the UN, my Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said in the General Assembly on 24 September 2011 that India has been steadfast in its

support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel, as per the relevant resolutions of this Organization, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Roadmap. The Prime Minister added that we look forward to welcoming Palestine as an equal member of the United Nations. We expect the Security Council to endorse Palestine's application so that the UNGA can take further action.

It is critical for the international community to work closely with the parties with a view to encouraging them to resume direct negotiations. In this context, we have noted the Quartet Statement of 23 September and hope that the timelines indicated in the Statement would be realized leading to enduring resolution of all final status issues, including refugees.

Till such time, Madam Chair, it is incumbent upon all of us to fully support UNRWA, as the primary source of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugees.

Thank You.

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