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STATEMENT

By

Per Ø. Landemoen

First Secretary

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Mr Chairman,

The services and humanitarian aid provided by UNRWA have for more than 50 years provided a growing refugee population with immediate relief, basic services and the possibility of a life in dignity. We commend the Agency and its staff for their untiring efforts to assist Palestinian refugees under difficult and often dangerous circumstances. UNRWA has a regional mandate provided by the General Assembly, and its efforts in each one of the host countries merits particular attention.

I would like to thank Commissioner-General Karen Koning Abu Zayd for her statement yesterday, which served to bring across the grim reality which she and her colleagues face daily. Nowhere is the situation for Palestinian refugees at present more desperate than in Gaza. As so many times before, UNRWA provides the only safety net available.

UN organisations and the International Red Cross Committee have warned us that violence, humiliation and poverty is pushing the Palestinian population into a deep crisis. Norway is deeply concerned about this development. Let us remember that 60 % of the people living in the Palestinian Territory are below the age of 18. Women and children carry the heaviest burden in the present situation.

Mr Chairman,

At this time last year, the Gaza disengagement was raising expectations of an improvement in the quality of life and in the freedom of movement for Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank. UNRWA took on a leading role in areas of job creation and community development. Today, the donor community once again looks to UNRWA to take on a leading role. Our focus has shifted to the most immediate needs of the refugee population. We are back to food distribution and sheer survival. There is little prospect for hope and dignity.

The growing needs facing UNRWA are reflected in the Revised Emergency Appeal for 2006. Norway has sought to contribute to keeping international attention on the deteriorating situation in the Palestinian Territory at a time when all eyes were on the tragedy unfolding in Lebanon. We were pleased to co-host the Geneva meeting in July and the Stockholm conference in September which brought together the donor community for this purpose.

In the expectation that needs will continue to increase Norway will increase its contribution to UNRWA's General Budget by 50 % in 2007. We will also continue to be an active dialogue partner in the ongoing efforts to strengthen the working relationship between UNRWA, the host nations and donor countries.

Thank you.