



PERMANENT MISSION OF TURKEY TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**STATEMENT BY MR. LEVENT BILGEN,
FIRST SECRETARY OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF TURKEY TO THE UN, BEFORE
THE SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE ON AGENDA ITEM
31: "UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN
THE NEAR EAST"**

New York, 1 November 2006

Mr. Chairman,

Turkey has fully associated itself with the statement delivered yesterday by the distinguished representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. I therefore only wish to elaborate on a number of issues which we deem significant under this agenda item.

Mr. Chairman,

The political developments in Palestine since the unilateral withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip and the recent Lebanon conflict have been stark reminders of the high stakes vis-à-vis the Middle East question. These events have proved, once again, the importance and the urgency to timely capture the opportunities and to engage with the parties to revive the peace process. Indeed, all sides should have realized by now that violence or military measures alone cannot resolve the entrenched political problems. We must also recognize that neither unilateral measures nor indifference for the misery and desperation of others could achieve the desired security and lasting peace in the region.

It is our sincere wish that the Palestinians succeed in their national effort to bring about a constructive atmosphere conducive for the establishment of their own State. It is equally vital for Israel to reciprocate accordingly and to facilitate such progress by changing its current policies towards the Palestinians. Both parties are cognizant of the steps they each have to take to fulfill their respective commitments and obligations under the Quartet Road Map plan. In this context, we welcome the declared willingness of both Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to meet without preconditions. We hope this exchange takes place sooner rather than later and that it initiates the envisioned process.

Mr. Chairman,

The Palestinian refugee issue represents the most complicated aspect of the Palestinian question. While the matter awaits a just solution as part of the negotiated final and comprehensive settlement in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions, the fundamental needs of the refugees in the meantime have to be met despite the challenging circumstances. This brings into focus the crucial role UNRWA plays for the Palestinian refugees.

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Mr. Chairman,

We very much appreciate the detailed, informative and eloquent presentation yesterday by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mrs. Karen Koning AbuZayd. Her presentation and the detailed report submitted earlier depict the very grim and tragic picture of the realities on the ground for the Palestinian refugees.

Turkey, for her part, is fully committed to UNRWA's goals and mandate. We follow with praise the Agency's ability to sustain the provision of the relief and humanitarian development services to the Palestinian refugees. In the absence of a political process to ease their plight, UNRWA has indeed become a life-line for them. This is certainly no easy task, considering the Agency's mandate could only be realized through constant financial and moral support by the international community. In the light of this situation, the Agency's accomplishments under Mrs. AbuZayd's able leadership are highly commendable. We also recognize the invaluable contribution of the UNRWA staff in their assistance to the Palestinian refugees, often under dangerous conditions particularly in this past year. On behalf of Turkey, I would like to convey to UNRWA our condolences for the loss a member its staff recently.

Mr. Chairman,

I would be remiss if I were not to underscore the successful reform process undertaken within UNRWA which aims to increase its efficiency and effectiveness. We welcome the progress made so far. We are equally pleased with the work of the expanded Advisory Commission of UNRWA, which Turkey is a member. We believe that the new structure of the Advisory Commission has better equipped the Agency to enhance the relationship between the stakeholders and the Palestinian refugees. We also endorse the recommendations contained in the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, which Turkey is privileged to Chair. I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Mission of Norway for their valuable contribution to the work of the said-Group as its Rapporteur.

In this framework, I would also like to state that Turkey is emerging as a donor country for various UN funds and programmes. For 2006, we have more than doubled our annual voluntary contribution to UNRWA to 500.000-USD. Furthermore, we provide in-kind assistance of food, medicine and medical supplies through UNRWA as an additional support of our humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugees. Turkey also channels direct assistance to the brotherly people of Palestine through a Plan of Action, which covers security, education, public financing, institution-building, SME development, health, tourism and agriculture, complementing UNRWA's programs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.