



NORWAY

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Aganda Item: 30 UNRWA

Fourth Committee

Presentation of the Report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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STATEMENT

by

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Minister Counsellor
Rapporteur

New York, 1 November 2005

Mr. President,

This is the fourth time I present the report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine. Even though the financial balance has improved over these four years, the underlying problem remains, the gap between the assessed needs and the available funds. Again the Working Group has to appeal to Governments to start contributing to UNRWA, to increase their contributions, to honor pledges made and to make contributions not just to the Agency's biennium budget, but also to the Medium Term Plan.

Even though the problem of the refugees is deeply rooted in a political issue which originated more than half a century ago the problems faced by the refugees today are, however, humanitarian. Problems we have a shared responsibility to address.

The services provided by UNRWA must be viewed as the minimum required to enable the refugees to lead productive lives. Any further reduction in those services would not only unfairly deprive the refugees of the minimum level of support to which they are entitled, but could also have a destabilising effect on the entire region.

Mr. President

The Working Group notes positively the declining funding gap for UNRWA's regular budget. It remains, however, concerned that this trend will not be maintained as some income, such as exchange-rate gains, may not be realised in the future.

The Working Group commends the Commissioner-General and all UNRWA staff for their tireless efforts to maintain the basic operations of the Agency despite the constraints on resources and access problems on the ground that they have faced.

It commends the Commissioner-General also for her fund-raising efforts, and for her commitment to keeping the major donors and host authorities informed and involved, opening new avenues of support and funding and seeking a broader base of donors. The Working Group encourages UNRWA to continue efforts to widen the donor base.

The Working Group calls for the early and complete fulfilment of pledges and other commitments to UNRWA, in particular the reimbursement of value-added tax and port charges by the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government.

The Working Group urges the international community to fully fund the 2006 – 2007 biennium budget, which has been prepared on a needs-basis, as it will enable the Agency to reverse the effects of successive years of under-funding to bring services up to host government standards and to build capacity within UNRWA.

In view of the continuing humanitarian difficulties in the occupied Palestinian territory, and the absence of any turnaround in high rates of poverty and unemployment in the near future, the Group recognised the need for certain elements of UNRWA's emergency interventions to continue in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Group called on the Israeli Government to enhance its cooperation with the Agency to maximize the benefit of donor contributions by ensuring speedy delivery of UNRWA services.

Mr. President

The Group continues to believe that UNRWA plays a vital role in preserving the stability and security of the region, The Group notes that the improvement in 2004 and 2005 of UNRWA's financial situation was a welcome development, but would have to be sustained and substantially increased to meet the requirements of the 2006-2007 biennium budget.

Finally, I will again on behalf of the Working Group appeal to the member countries to maintain high level of contributions, increase their contributions or start contributing to UNRWA.

Thank you Mr. President