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Chair: Mr. Messone (Gabon)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 52: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

(A/67/13, A/67/382, A/67/331, A/67/334, A/67/343 and A/67/365)

1. **The Chair** said that for more than 63 years, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had provided protection, education, health, relief and social services to a large number of refugees, currently numbering approximately 4.8 million. The Agency had been operating under very difficult conditions, sometimes in conflict areas, with limited financial support.

Statement by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA

2. **Mr. Grandi** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA), after paying tribute to five of the Agency's staff members who had recently been killed in Syria, said that, at a time when the Arab Spring had brought dynamism and attention to the Middle East, Palestinians, and Palestine refugees in particular, remained sidelined, forgotten by the international community and increasingly vulnerable amid new and old conflicts. At the same time, UNRWA itself was being subjected to renewed attacks peddling the simplistic and damaging falsehood that it was the cause of the prolonged Palestine refugee issue. With no prospect of an early, just solution to their plight, frustration was growing among the refugees, reflecting the hopelessness and despair that overwhelmed them. UNRWA was providing crucial services, especially in health and education. However, the Agency still faced two major challenges to its ability to provide basic humanitarian services: the prevalence of conflict and a scarcity of funds.

3. By 2020, the population of Gaza would have grown by a further half a million people, who would need to be fed, housed, educated and employed. More than half of them would be under the age of 18. By 2020, they would face the prospect of having no fresh water. UNRWA would need to add 2,500 medical and teaching staff to its personnel. The blockade had created a skewed economy, based on public salaries funded by international assistance and by trade through tunnels; most people continued to depend on food and cash assistance. Yet that assistance was also at risk and UNRWA had already been forced to cut a number of activities because of underfunding. Despite the limited

easing of some of the blockade restrictions, the task of rebuilding the Gaza Strip was made more difficult for UNRWA by Israel's delays in approving projects and the complex requirements it imposed. That had cost the Agency \$5 million of donor money in 2011 alone. Clearly, violence had to end, including rockets launched against civilian communities in southern Israel, in violation of international law; but the blockade must be lifted because, without drastic changes, Gaza would remain in a man-made crisis, 80 per cent aid dependent and economically strangled.

4. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where refugees represented almost 30 per cent of the population, a devastating protection crisis prevailed; the asphyxiation of traditional herding livelihoods were causing unbearable hardship for countless people and were a major obstacle to peace. UNRWA was working closely with other United Nations agencies to address some of the most urgent consequences of the situation, with a particular focus on vulnerable Palestine refugee communities in the seam zones, East Jerusalem and Area C. However, humanitarian funding was drying up and there was a lack of real action in respect of settlement expansion and other violations of international law.

5. Since 2011, Palestine refugees had found themselves caught in the crisis in Syria, where they had traditionally enjoyed generous hospitality, complemented by access to UNRWA services, employment and enjoyment of basic rights. A significant number of Palestine refugees had been killed, injured or compelled to move from their homes. It was crucial that all sides refrain from conducting hostilities in civilian areas and comply with their obligations, under international law, to protect Palestine refugees and other civilians across Syria. UNRWA remained committed to supporting Palestine refugees by maintaining existing services, to the extent that security allowed, and providing additional assistance wherever necessary, albeit in difficult and dangerous circumstances. He expressed appreciation to donors who had contributed to the Agency's Regional Response Plan; 43 per cent of the Plan had been funded, and the bulk of resources was destined to Palestine refugees in Syria, to provide various services, including direct cash payments, food and non-food assistance, and for developing alternative education modalities to support children and teachers unable to attend school. However, if the violence did

not stop, ever greater numbers of Palestine refugees would require support

6. Under the Regional Response Plan, UNRWA was also seeking US\$ 10 million to assist Palestine refugees from Syria fleeing to Jordan and Lebanon, where there were already large Palestine refugee communities. Countries neighbouring Syria had once again assumed a large burden in receiving a huge influx of Syrian refugees; Palestine refugees leaving Syria for temporary protection were fleeing the same grave dangers as other refugees. UNRWA had received information concerning a number of Palestinians being denied protection; he appealed to neighbouring countries to apply humanitarian criteria, not to distinguish between different categories of refugees, and to avoid any refoulement or deportation until the conflict in Syria had been resolved. UNRWA stood ready to cooperate with the authorities in order to minimize any burden on host communities.

7. Conditions for Palestine refugees in Lebanon also remained very difficult. Their right to work was limited, and they were not allowed to own property. Poverty was rife, living conditions in camps were squalid, and services that UNRWA was unable to deliver, such as advanced health care, were out of reach for a majority of refugees. A priority was to finish the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Bared camp, which had been totally destroyed in 2007, leaving 27,000 refugees homeless, but funding remained slow and inadequate. So far, UNRWA had enough money to rebuild half the camp and was also in discussions with the Lebanese Government regarding some easing of the restrictions on transporting building materials into camps and amending the labour code to give Palestine refugees broad access to employment.

8. UNRWA was a large United Nations agency providing public services to an entire population across several countries, but it was reliant on voluntary financing, which was unpredictable. That problem had created challenges to its sustainability over the decades, and the current juncture was particularly difficult. With a Palestine refugee population growing at 3.5 per cent a year and with a number of donors experiencing economic difficulties, funding shortfalls were increasingly affecting the Agency's viability. Any reduction in the Agency's services would be not only politically risky but also morally wrong. However, the range of large donors remained narrow. The generosity of the European Union and some of its member States,

and of Australia, Japan, Norway, Switzerland and the United States of America, which together accounted for 90 per cent of the Agency's funding, was very greatly appreciated. Nonetheless, the Agency's General Fund was in a perilous state. Overall contributions had remained static for almost five years, while refugee needs had grown and costs had increased. It was vital and urgent to expand the donor base.

9. In order to operate as cost-effectively and efficiently as possible, UNRWA had undergone far-reaching management reform since 2006 and was now realigning its field operations, particularly in education and health, to improve quality and ensure the best value for money. In addition, strict austerity measures had been imposed: support costs had been squeezed, activities postponed, and payments to contractors delayed. The current year's core budget had been reduced by \$25 million, which meant that the Agency was running essential services with no financial reserves. It was also necessary to address the issue of staff salaries and find a balance between fiscal prudence and fair wages; UNRWA was conducting consultations with its stakeholders, including staff unions, in that regard, but unless it secured \$37 million by the end of the month, it would be unable to pay December salaries. Current trends indicated that the initial financial shortfall for 2013 under the General Fund would be almost US\$ 70 million.

10. UNRWA, which was neither the cause nor the solution to the question of the refugees, was more necessary than ever. Compounding the absence of the political solutions that would make UNRWA unnecessary, crises had multiplied in the past decades in the Middle East, creating new and costly needs. What was needed was a sustained quantum leap in the international community's collective commitment to the Agency. All Member States, but particularly those countries whose economic growth was matched by a more assertive political role, specifically countries in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, were urged to step up to the important task of supporting UNRWA, both for humanitarian reasons and in the interests of regional and global stability.

Interactive dialogue

11. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine) thanked Mr. Grandi and all UNRWA staff and employees for their admirable work on behalf of over 5 million refugees, and also for the detailed and very sombre

report. The story of the Palestinian refugees was a continuous tragedy of people moving from one difficult situation to another. The situation in Syria, in particular, was adding to the tragedy, because, despite the Palestinian people's efforts to avoid being affected by the events of the Arab Spring, they could not fully insulate themselves from it.

12. It was vital for those States that were able to donate to the Agency to do so. Funding shortfalls put pressure on UNRWA services, and that sometimes gave the impression to refugees that the Agency was not addressing their needs. Mr. Grandi had rejected the myth that UNRWA was perpetuating the refugee problem, but a more detailed explanation would be welcome.

13. **Mr. Grandi** said that while UNRWA was not responsible for perpetuating the refugee problem, the fact that the situation had lasted for over 60 years created its own problems, such as donor fatigue. The passage of time had made the task of finding a solution more difficult, but only political will could break the vicious circle. UNRWA was not directly involved in the political negotiations, but it was reasonable to draw attention to the conflict and call for a resolution to the protracted problem.

14. If UNRWA were to close down ahead of a political agreement, there would inevitably be tangible human consequences. Half a million children would not go to school, and the presence of a vast, uneducated population would be a grave risk to stability. If UNRWA ceased to provide health services, much would be taken away from the little that the refugees had. To remove UNRWA was not to remove the problem; the problem had to be addressed the other way around.

15. **Ms. Ziadé** (Lebanon) commended the work of Mr. Grandi and his team. Her delegation supported Mr. Grandi's call for additional funds, and wished to emphasize that the relevance of UNRWA was not under discussion. The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were living in dire conditions, but her Government had developed a new approach, despite its own financial challenges, to improve their quality of life. It continued to be supportive of the work of UNRWA. She asked how her Government could help fundraising efforts around the world, including in Latin America and Asia.

16. **Mr. Grandi** said that UNRWA enjoyed excellent cooperation with the Government of Lebanon,

especially since 2005; much progress had been made in improving living conditions in the refugee camps. First-hand encounters in various countries had recently shown that there was strong support for UNRWA, not only among Governments, but also in terms of public opinion, and it was important to encourage some countries to step up their contributions and share the funding burden, which for the most part was still carried by a small number of donors. In difficult financial times, additional donors with resources and influence were urgently needed.

Statement by the Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA

17. **Mr. Løvold** (Norway), introducing the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA (A/67/382), underscored the seriousness of the Agency's financial crisis, which was even worse than it had been in 2011. With an expected deficit at year's end of \$37.4 million, the Agency might be unable to cover the December payroll for its 31,000 staff across the Middle East. Since approximately 80 per cent of the Agency's General Fund expenditure related to staff costs, which tended to increase as the refugee population grew each year, it had been difficult for UNRWA to reduce spending enough to meet both short-term cash flow requirements and the medium-term funding shortfall. Nonetheless, UNRWA had managed to continue reforming its health, relief and education programmes, and it had implemented a new accounting system, the International Public Sector Accounting Standards. However, its working capital, which had been used in the past to compensate for shortfalls of income against expenditures, was now virtually exhausted, and must be replenished as a matter of high priority.

18. The Agency had renewed its appeal to donors to make additional efforts to fully fund the Agency's core budget and had made particular efforts to widen its donor base. The consequences of the structural financial crisis were many and dramatic: not only were the Agency's services being undermined, but also staff members were enduring additional hardships and the Agency's ability to continue its management reform process, among other efforts, and to comply with General Assembly mandated initiatives, was in jeopardy. The Working Group welcomed the increase in funding from the United Nations regular budget by \$5 million approved by the General Assembly in 2011.

19. UNRWA continued to face many challenges in its fields of operation, including increased port and related transit charges as a result of import measures put in place by the Israeli Government. The Working Group urged the Government of Israel to expedite its efforts to ease restrictions and increase the amount of goods entering Gaza. It underscored the importance of the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009) and stressed that import restrictions rendered the population even more reliant on the Agency's services. Lack of funding was jeopardizing several of the essential emergency programmes of UNRWA in Gaza and the West Bank and the reconstruction of the Nahr El Bared camp in Lebanon. The crisis in Syria, where the Agency had been providing cash assistance and food aid to beneficiaries, created additional financial needs.

20. The Working Group reiterated its belief that UNRWA played a vital role in providing assistance to Palestine refugees and in preserving the stability and security of the region; it was therefore gravely concerned about the exceptionally large funding gap anticipated for the Agency's General Fund, not only in 2012, but also for 2013. It was the responsibility of the international community to ensure that the Agency's services were maintained at an acceptable level and that funding kept pace with changing needs and the growth of the refugee population. Accordingly, the Working Group urged new and existing donor Governments to make increased contributions to UNRWA on a timely and regular basis, to ensure full funding of the UNRWA budget for the biennium 2012-2013, and also to put in place increased multi-year funding to enable UNRWA to better plan its activities; it also highlighted the need to identify potential sources of funding to meet the severance payment obligations of UNRWA.

General debate

21. **Ms. Nasser** (Observer for Palestine) said that in light of Israel's continuing denial of the rights of the Palestine refugees, its provocative rhetoric and its tactics of attrition, she wished to reaffirm the right of return of the Palestine refugees and their right to just compensation for their losses and suffering, on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), as well as the right of the Palestinians displaced in the June 1967 hostilities to return to their homes and lands in accordance with the relevant United Nations

resolutions. She recognized the important role played by the international community in the absence of a solution, including its support for UNRWA.

22. The plight of the Palestine refugees was of the highest priority to the Palestinian leadership as it continued to seek a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The international community must live up to its responsibilities and obligations in accordance with the United Nations Charter, international law and all relevant United Nations resolutions in order to bring an end to the injustice.

23. UNRWA had many achievements to its credit, despite the serious challenges it faced on the ground, and financially, and it was contributing to stability in the region. She expressed concern that in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, the human rights of the Palestine refugees continued to be grossly violated and their socioeconomic conditions gravely affected by Israel's illegal policies and measures, including military raids and air strikes, colonization measures in the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza. Israel also continued to hamper the Agency's work by impeding movement of persons and goods, access by UNRWA staff and the delivery of services to refugees, in serious violation of international law. She commended the Agency's protection projects and the continued important role played by the operations support officers.

24. She expressed appreciation to the Government of Lebanon for its cooperation with UNRWA, including with regard to reconstruction of the Nahr El-Bared camp, and appealed for further donor support for that project. She urged the Agency to continue efforts to improve living conditions and infrastructure in the camps in Lebanon and stressed that such improvement would not prejudice a just solution pursuant to the relevant United Nations resolutions. She hoped that legislation would be implemented to facilitate access by Palestine refugees in Lebanon to the labour market and reaffirmed the Palestinian leadership's continued cooperation with the Government of Lebanon to ensure security and calm in the camps, and the need for respect by all for the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon.

25. She expressed grave concern about the instability in the refugee camps in the Syrian Arab Republic and appealed for increased funding for the Agency to allow it to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to

affected refugees in Syria and to those who had fled to neighbouring countries. She urged continued facilitation of access and recognized the valuable cooperation of the host country.

26. She reiterated calls to all donors and stakeholders to continue and increase their contributions to UNRWA to ensure that it was able to carry out its mandated responsibilities. She called for an intensification of efforts in support of the peaceful aspirations of the Palestinian people to realize their inalienable rights, including the rights to self-determination and the independence of their State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the 1967 borders, and a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees.

27. **Mr. Al Habib** (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Nations, said that for over 60 years, UNRWA had been the leading force in the international community's efforts to contribute to the betterment of the living conditions of the Palestinian people and to stability in the region. The Agency's role would be essential until a just and lasting solution to the plight of the refugees had been achieved, including their right to return and to fair compensation. He expressed grave concern about the critical situation of the Palestine refugees, including those living in the camps in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and particularly in the Gaza Strip.

28. The killing, injury, harassment and intimidation of Agency staff members by the Israeli occupying forces, and the ongoing imposition of restrictions on the freedom of movement and access of the Agency's staff, vehicles and goods were undermining the Agency's work. The Non-Aligned Movement condemned Israel's failure to protect United Nations personnel, premises and property and called upon Israel to comply fully with its obligations under international law. Israel must end its illegally imposed blockade on the Gaza Strip, which had been steadily tightened since June 2007, and had had a disastrous impact on the humanitarian and economic conditions of the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees.

29. The Non-Aligned Movement also expressed grave concern regarding the critical situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as a result of Israel's continuing military occupation and illegal policies and practices. It called on the international community to uphold its moral,

political and legal responsibilities to bring an end to Israel's illegal policies and all its violations against the Palestinian people. It encouraged all donors to continue to make generous efforts to help UNRWA overcome its financial shortfalls and funding gaps and welcomed the provision of financial resources from the regular budget of the United Nations in accordance with General Assembly resolution 65/272. It reiterated its support for the Agency's unwavering efforts to provide assistance to the Palestine refugees in all fields of operation and recognized the important role of the host countries. It underlined the need to address the current humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and called for an intensification of efforts by the entire international community to achieve a settlement that guaranteed an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory and the independence of a sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as a just solution for the Palestine refugee problem.

30. **Mr. Hallergard** (European Union) speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States, said that the acceding country, Croatia, the candidate countries, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, aligned themselves with his statement. The European Union deeply appreciated the Agency's invaluable work, performed under very difficult circumstances, in a region frequently afflicted by conflict and unrest; it welcomed the Agency's work in Syria, where UNRWA was proving to be an effective partner on the ground. Despite the financial difficulties currently affecting many donor nations, the European Union and its member States remained the Agency's largest donor, having provided 1.4 billion euros to the Agency between 2000 and 2012; the European Union was doing its utmost to help UNRWA close its financial gap for 2012 through an additional contribution to the General Fund. It urged new donors to commit financially to the Agency's work, and encouraged the Agency's intensified efforts to mobilize regional, private and emerging donors.

31. The reform process was of crucial importance, particularly in terms of budget clarity. The European Union looked forward to the implementation of the Agency's management and programme reforms and

welcomed the focus on results-based management. Quality of services, affordability, efficiency and effectiveness must continue to be at the heart of reforms. Staff costs constituted approximately 80 per cent of the Agency's total cost, and it was essential for the Agency to monitor increases closely since in the long term they could threaten resources for the delivery of services to refugees. The European Union's aim was more and better services for the money spent; it looked forward to engaging with UNRWA on budget planning and the Agency's medium term and long-term strategies. It was determined to ensure that the essential humanitarian and development needs of the refugees were continually met until there was a just, fair and agreed solution to the refugee question, as part of a comprehensive future settlement of final status issues.

32. **Mr. Lissovoy** (Russian Federation) said that the Russian Federation attached great importance to the humanitarian work of UNRWA, which was making a significant contribution to maintaining stability in the Palestinian territories and in other Arab States where Palestine refugees were living. It was important for the Agency's projects to be carried out continuously. He expressed special appreciation to the UNRWA staff who were working in Syria under very dangerous conditions.

33. His Government provided financial, humanitarian and other types of assistance to the Palestinian people. In recent years it had provided three non-reimbursable tranches of \$10 million each to the Palestinian administration and it was preparing to provide additional resources in 2013. In 2012 it had decided to make a one-time contribution of \$2 million to the UNRWA budget. It was continuing to afford the Palestinians assistance in the area of education; every year 150 scholarships were provided to Palestinian students and a secondary school for Palestinians would be opened in Bethlehem in the current year. It was providing food aid through the World Food Programme, including \$2 million in 2012. In the area of security, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs organized training courses every year for Palestinian security personnel; unfortunately the Israeli authorities had so far not authorized the provision of armoured vehicles and automatic weapons to the Palestinian side, and those supplies were being stored in Jordan.

34. In view of the financial crisis and socioeconomic difficulties of the Palestinian administration,

international efforts to assist the Palestinians needed to be intensified. It must be borne in mind that the socioeconomic and humanitarian problems of the Palestinian population could be resolved only through the attainment of a just and long-term peace in the region, which required an end to the occupation and the establishment of an independent, viable and territorially intact Palestinian State, living in peace and security with Israel and other neighbours. His delegation called for the early resumption of negotiations between Palestine and Israel on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the road map and the Arab peace initiative. The major transformations in the region made that task even more urgent.

35. **Mr. Govender** (South Africa) said that the General Assembly's renewal of the mandate of UNRWA every three years was a reflection of the failure by the international community to settle the Palestinian people's longstanding and legitimate claim to the right of self-determination and peaceful coexistence. His delegation strongly rejected any notion that UNRWA had politicized its humanitarian mandate and was dismayed by the response to the Secretary-General by the Israeli Government, in documents A/67/331 and A/67/334, to the effect that the standard principles guiding the United Nations with respect to the treatment of refugees should be applied in the Palestinian context. The mandate of UNRWA went far beyond the provision of refugee services to peoples living under occupation and extended to three sovereign States; South Africa would welcome the earliest reintegration of Palestinian refugees from all the refugee camps, especially those in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, into a contiguous Palestinian State, a process in which UNRWA could play a substantial role.

36. The Palestinian leadership had demonstrated their governance ability in building state institutions in the face of daunting political and security challenges. His delegation called on all members of the Security Council to support the Palestinian bid for membership of the United Nations.

37. UNRWA had done much to help the Palestinian refugee population over the past six decades, while meeting the challenge of providing services in five geographically separate areas. The Agency's provision of quality education through its network of more than 700 schools was a direct contribution towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 2; it was

therefore alarming that UNRWA schools had become targets of explosive ordnance and air strikes. His delegation was dismayed about the inability of many Palestinians to access health care from the Gaza Strip. Blockades imposed on the movement of goods and services in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were impeding sustainable economic development. The Agency's resolve to restore dignity to an oppressed people, even in the face of bureaucracy and international law violations, was highly laudable; UNRWA was also contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security in a highly volatile region. South Africa would continue its strong support for UNRWA and had once again pledged its annual financial contribution. The international community must display the required political will so that the plight of the Palestinian people was not allowed to deteriorate any further. Both parties must renew their commitment to negotiations, with a view to the establishment of a Palestinian State coexisting peacefully alongside Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

38. **Mr. Al-Attiah** (Qatar) commended the work of UNRWA, especially its educational programme, which not only provided basic and technical education for thousands of young Palestinian children, but also helped them maintain their cultural identity. Unfortunately the Agency's efforts might be in vain if the Israeli authorities continued to tighten the economic blockade, especially in the Gaza Strip, which was on the brink of economic collapse, and where dependence of the population on aid had reached unprecedented levels. The international community must compel the Israeli Government to refrain from any military attacks against unarmed Palestinian civilians. Allegations made over the past few days by some Israeli media outlets that Hamas had used UNRWA facilities during the Israeli aggression on Gaza in 2008 to launch rockets at Israeli cities were false and intended only to undermine the Agency's reputation, as well as to hide the crimes committed by the Israeli authorities against the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip.

39. The rising numbers of Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA and the lack of funding to meet their needs were a source of concern, as was the Agency's recent decision to lay off 130 employees in the West Bank and to reduce health services there. It was essential for the international community to

provide the Agency with the necessary financial support to enable it to carry out its functions. The main reason for the plight of the Palestinian people was the Israeli occupation, the illegal Israeli practices against the Palestinian people and the deprivation of their inalienable right of return. The Agency's services were indispensable, and its work had an impact on the stability of the region as a whole. There could not conceivably be a just solution to the Palestinian issue that did not take into account the Palestinian people's legitimate demands for an independent, viable Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes.

40. **Mr. AlRadaidah** (Jordan) said that Jordan was not merely an advocate but also a direct and immediate stakeholder in the Palestine question as the largest host and donor to Palestine refugees. His Government stood firm on their right of return and their right to compensation, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and other resolutions. His Government hosted more than 40 per cent of all Palestine refugees, but only about 20 per cent of the UNRWA budget was allocated to Jordan. It provided Palestinian refugees with a wide range of services including health care, education and social welfare. It was also hosting more than 215,000 Syrian refugees, who had fled to Jordan seeking security and stability. Such a population increase in a small country of approximately 6 million people placed a heavy burden on Jordan's resources and infrastructure, particularly in the areas of water, energy, health and education. Despite those pressures, Jordan had opted to keep its doors open to its brethren in need; the work carried out by UNRWA relieved some of the burden.

41. His Government was deeply concerned about the dwindling budget and lack of adequate financial support for UNRWA, although it welcomed the provisions of General Assembly resolution 65/272. It was incumbent upon the international community to increase its support to UNRWA both financially and politically until the final resolution of the refugee question.

42. **Mr. White** (Australia) commended the work of UNRWA, whose assistance was helping to lay the foundations for improved security and stability in the region, and whose focus on education and health was a vital investment in the human capital that was essential for building a successful Palestinian State. Australia

was a major donor to UNRWA and, in May 2012, had signed a \$90 million five-year partnership with the Agency. Australia's assistance would be disbursed unearmarked into the UNRWA General Fund, giving the Agency greater flexibility in implementing activities according to its priorities and making sound decisions.

43. Australia welcomed the Agency's efforts to reduce expenditures through austerity measures and the progress it had made in implementing health and education reforms which helped achieve greater efficiency in service delivery. In response to the Agency's call for additional funds, his Government had brought forward one of its planned payments in 2012. It urged donors to provide UNRWA with the necessary funds to address its current shortfall, in particular so that salaries could be paid through the end of December, and encouraged regional donors, among others, to continue to support the Agency's core budget. Australia recognized the in-kind contributions made to UNRWA by the host countries. It commended the Agency's ongoing response to the crisis in Syria and its provision of services to other vulnerable Palestinian groups, including in Lebanon. As budgetary circumstances were likely to remain tight, the Agency should continue to direct its resources to where they were needed most.

44. While the services which UNRWA provided to Palestinian refugees were essential for maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East, it was only through a fair and just political solution to the conflict that lasting peace could be secured. Australia shared the world's frustration at the standstill in the Middle East peace process, recognizing as it did both the legitimate desire of Palestinians for statehood and also Israel's legitimate security concerns, which would be best guaranteed through an effective and genuine two-State solution. To that end, an early resumption of direct negotiations was to be hoped for.

45. **Mr. Abulhasan** (Kuwait) commended the services provided to Palestinian refugees by UNRWA and by the host countries. Since its establishment, the Agency had pursued its mission unflaggingly; however, the continued destruction and the killing of unarmed people by the Israeli occupying forces made matters more complex. The forces of occupation had prevented goods from entering Gaza for five years, and the continued deficit in financing under those conditions of

siege had made it difficult for UNRWA to perform its functions.

46. Kuwait remained fully committed to UNRWA, and had increased its annual contribution from \$1.5 million to \$2 million. The Agency's financial crisis was a source of concern, inasmuch as any reduction in its funding would affect peace in the region. It could not be said too often that Palestinian refugees had the right to return to their home country and live in peace. Kuwait continued to support the efforts of UNRWA pending the settlement of the question.

47. **Ms. Comesaña Perdomo** (Cuba) said that UNRWA was doing extraordinary work to alleviate the living conditions of the Palestine refugees; there was no justification for the Palestinians continuing to languish under the Israeli occupation that was depriving them of their human rights, including the right of self-determination and the right of return. The deterioration of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was a source of serious concern, and several of Israel's illegal practices, such as the building of the separation wall and the construction of settlements, continued in flagrant violation of international law. The humanitarian situation was alarming, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where Israel's policy of restricting the movement of goods and people was impeding vital activities such as the rebuilding of schools. Israel must put an end to its policy of closures, which was causing serious socioeconomic damage.

48. UNRWA was obliged to carry out its work in extremely difficult conditions. Losses incurred as a consequence of transit delays and restricted access must be reimbursed. It was unacceptable for Israel to continue to violate international agreements on the protection of United Nations premises and personnel. The international community must address the Agency's alarming financial situation; its financing shortfalls were undermining its ability to carry out its mandate and compromising the ongoing institutional development process. Her Government urged the donor community to fulfil its pledges to UNRWA. Cuba firmly supported the struggle of the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right of self-determination and establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

49. **Ms. Díaz Mendoza** (Venezuela) commended the work of UNRWA, which had a positive impact on the

lives of the Palestine refugees, but recalled the responsibility of the international community to find a just and lasting solution to the conflict that would involve the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, that would guarantee the right of Palestinians to return to their land. Her Government condemned the blockade on the Gaza Strip, which was causing a major humanitarian disaster and a sharp increase in poverty and unemployment, while constantly impeding the work of UNRWA. Delays in the approval of projects and restrictions on the import of building materials were making the living conditions very precarious. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the situation was equally difficult: the policy of building illegal settlements, the expulsion of Arab inhabitants, increased settler violence, road blocks, demolitions and confiscations continued to impinge on the rights of Palestinians and thwart the work of the Agency. The Government of Israel must lift all restrictions on the circulation of goods and the free movement of Agency personnel.

50. The financial challenges facing UNRWA, as the principal supplier of services to the Palestinian refugees, were a source of deep concern. Her delegation supported all efforts to improve the living conditions of Palestine refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic and acknowledged the significant assistance provided by the host countries. It fully supported recognition of the Palestinian State as a full Member of the United Nations.

51. **Mr. Rey** (Switzerland) expressed appreciation for the reform efforts of UNRWA, which were beginning to bear fruit. The regional context in which the Agency operated remained extremely volatile, and the Palestine refugees were especially affected by the socioeconomic crisis and the lack of progress in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Agency played a key role in responding to their immediate and long-term needs and its stabilizing effect should not be underestimated. In that context, it was essential to pursue ambitious measures to combat extreme poverty and to provide prospects for young people in terms of education and employment. Switzerland strongly supported the Agency's efforts to implement reforms in the field of education, relief and social services and attached particular importance to the development of vocational training programmes throughout the region. It reiterated its support for reforms that shifted from

traditional food aid distribution programmes to measures that could combat poverty more effectively.

52. Switzerland remained concerned about the systematic violations of international humanitarian law in the West Bank, especially in East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip. It also deplored the consequences of the armed conflict in Syria for the civilian population, including Palestinian refugees, and appealed to the parties to respect the rights of the Palestine refugees and to the neighbouring countries to respect their right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement.

53. More than ever in the current context, UNRWA required adequate funds to fulfil its mandate. The financing of the General Fund remained a cause for concern. Switzerland noted with appreciation the efforts made by Agency employees to contribute to austerity measures. It had increased its contribution by 10 per cent and committed itself to biannual financing and it further intended to make an additional exceptional contribution and to align its contributions with the priorities defined by the Agency; it had also mobilized additional resources to meet the most urgent needs of the Palestinian refugees affected by the situation in Syria. Switzerland urged others to follow suit, and expected the United Nations system to support UNRWA in a more systematic manner through the three pillars of peace promotion, human rights and development. The necessary reforms must be implemented immediately. Furthermore, the Agency's Advisory Commission and its subcommittee needed to demonstrate a resolve and consistent engagement that matched the Agency's challenges. Switzerland was, as always, prepared to act as a facilitator in a constructive dialogue between the Agency, its donors, and representatives of the host countries, and to continue its close cooperation with the Agency, pending a just and lasting solution to the Palestine refugee question..

54. **Mr. Pedersen** (Norway) said that the political upheaval in the Arab region was creating challenges for UNRWA, while the global economic crisis was affecting both donors and host countries. Norway appreciated the Agency's invaluable assistance in improving the lives of Palestine refugees across the region, including Syria, in a situation of constantly increasing numbers and needs. It welcomed the efforts to reform the Agency, both in terms of programme delivery and in terms of reduction of administrative costs. UNRWA had used its resources effectively, and had achieved substantial improvements in financial

management and transparency; that process needed to continue in close consultation with the donors.

55. The shortfall of the Agency's regular budget had become a recurrent problem, but it was significantly worse in 2012. Over recent years, the same ideas and proposals had been reiterated in the Committee debates. His delegation believed that the Agency's long-term financial challenges required a structural change in terms of how the Agency was funded; how it operated; and how it cooperated with other stakeholders and partners. It welcomed the new contributions from Arab countries to the General Fund, and from other new donors, as well as the increased contributions by existing donors. Norway encouraged UNRWA to intensify its efforts to mobilize regional, private and emerging donors with its new resource mobilization strategy. Increased transparency and accountability were important to ensure donors' readiness to make substantial contributions. His Government was aware that UNRWA could not reduce its expenditures beyond a certain point without creating hardship for its staff, but progress had been made. In the medium and long term it looked forward to discussing with UNRWA and other donors how to adjust the expenditures and the workforce in tandem with programme priorities.

56. His Government welcomed the reform of the relief and social services and encouraged UNRWA to strengthen its capacity to target the most vulnerable refugees to ensure that the financial shortfall would not harm the ones who needed its services the most. Accordingly, UNRWA must strengthen its ability to allocate resources according to needs. Finally, a reassessment of the Agency's cooperation with all other stakeholders and partners was needed; as a first step, synergies should be sought with other United Nations agencies and humanitarian and development actors, including improved coordination with the Palestinian Authority and host countries, in order to avoid overlap. The Agency's efforts to protect the rights of Palestine refugees under international law were essential in the search for a negotiated political solution; UNRWA was playing an important role in making Palestine ready for statehood.

57. **Archbishop Chullikatt** (Observer for the Holy See) commended the implementation by UNRWA of critical financial reforms needed to meet the changing realities in the region. The Holy See, through its charitable organizations, and with the assistance of Catholic donor agencies from various countries, was

working in the areas of education and health and providing services to the homeless and the unemployed. Various transnational agencies under the Holy See's auspices, such as the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and others, were working alongside UNRWA in the refugee host countries. The Holy See shared the concerns of the Commissioner-General; the needs of the refugees were growing even as resources became more limited, and the uncertain future of the refugees sowed seeds of possible radicalization for the young. In order for education to promote hope for the future, peace must return to the region.

58. It was to be hoped that the problems caused by the many conflicts of the region would finally be resolved through negotiation and dialogue. A lasting solution must include the status of the holy city of Jerusalem; there must be internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free, and unhindered access to the holy places by the faithful of all religions and nationalities. It was only through a just and lasting peace that the legitimate aspirations of all the peoples of the Holy Land could be fulfilled.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.