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Chair: Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq)
later: Mr. Pindják (Slovakia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 50: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
([A/74/13](#), [A/74/332](#), [A/74/307](#) and [A/74/337](#))

Statement by the Officer-in-Charge of UNRWA

1. **Mr. Saunders** (Officer-in-Charge, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)), presenting the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA ([A/74/13](#)), said that ensuring the continuity of UNRWA operations and providing strong leadership with a focus on essential reforms were priorities for the Agency under the current circumstances, which were exacerbated by the worst cash-flow situation in its history. UNRWA would require the support of Member States to navigate the difficult period successfully. Indeed, its bilateral and multilateral partners had responded positively and candidly to its call for assistance.

2. The events leading to the rapid leadership transition at the Agency had prompted an internal review and the development of a range of management initiatives, including revitalizing the interaction between UNRWA and its Advisory Commission; re-delegating authority and accountability to the field, thus bringing operational management and decision-making closer to the ground; further augmenting transparency and oversight; and reviewing human resource management in order to simplify and streamline processes.

3. By November 2018, the Agency's shortfall, resulting from the withdrawal of funding by its largest single donor, had been reduced from \$446 million to \$64 million. However, a year later, the Agency found itself in an even more critical situation, with a funding gap of \$89 million and staff salaries, core service delivery and emergency operations at imminent risk. For example, unless the Agency received contributions immediately, it would not be able to pay staff salaries for November. It was already deferring vendor payments, as it had virtually no cash on hand and no working capital reserves. Some partners that had generously pledged funds had yet to transfer them, while others had conditioned their pledges and transfers on actions to be taken by the Agency and the Secretariat to address the management issues that had been widely reported. Those issues were indeed being addressed properly.

4. The Agency fully respected donor discretion as a sovereign right. Nevertheless, a service rupture would affect the most vulnerable beneficiaries, including the over 1.5 million refugees receiving basic emergency

assistance and the 23,000 patients a day treated in UNRWA clinics in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank. He therefore appealed to all partners and Member States to urgently disburse their pledged funds to help UNRWA maintain its operations.

5. Establishing constructive dialogue with the Agency's staff unions was another priority. The first conference with the staff unions held in September had ended amicably, with management agreeing to increase service benefits at little additional cost to the Agency. That somewhat symbolic gesture had been essential to demonstrate that management recognized and was willing to address, within available resources, the difficulties that staff had faced as a result of the dire financial situation. The staff union in Jordan had sought a salary increase comparable to that afforded by the Government of Jordan to its employees, since it was well-established Agency policy that the salary scales of the host countries served as the comparator for UNRWA staff in equivalent functions. While the Agency had initially resisted the decision due to its difficult financial situation, it had consented to the increase, mindful that it could not keep its staff eternally hostage to financial constraints, particularly if it was to retain a quality workforce to provide quality services. As staff unions in other fields of operation sought increases, management would consult with all stakeholders, including host authorities, in a spirit of dialogue.

6. In Gaza, some 1.1 million Palestine refugees now relied on UNRWA for their basic needs and, in particular, for food, owing to the collapse of the economy. The astronomical rates of poverty and unemployment and the attendant social pressures in Gaza made assistance a humanitarian imperative. The blockade had not been eased, and there were reports of donors stopping fuel subsidies that had helped keep the electricity plant in Gaza running. Protests near the boundary with Israel continued amidst a shaky ceasefire. Against that backdrop, the steep reduction in funding for the Agency's emergency appeal would undermine stability and security in Gaza and beyond, hence the need for the international community to increase its support for UNRWA emergency assistance programmes.

7. In the West Bank, the Agency was monitoring developments relating to its presence in East Jerusalem and public statements made by the municipal government about replicating UNRWA services. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs was engaging with the Agency on the matter. UNRWA was working to ensure the quality of programme delivery in East Jerusalem, and enrolment in Agency schools had risen recently. Protection remained a challenge in the West

Bank, the site of incursions by security forces into refugee camps and the use of live fire and tear gas. The Agency continued to engage with Israeli security officials, producing changes on the ground in some instances.

8. In Syria, glimmers of hope were emerging for the resilient community of 450,000 Palestine refugees after eight years of devastating conflict. UNRWA continued to restore services in camps where security conditions permitted it to do so. The Agency's emergency appeal for Syria had not received the resources needed, forcing it to allocate assistance to only the most vulnerable. It hoped that the international community would do everything possible to increase its support for UNRWA emergency programmes in Syria.

9. In Lebanon, the roughly 28,000 Palestine refugees from Syria continued to languish in extremely difficult living conditions, with many unable to obtain or renew civil documentation, affecting their legal status. Though the Agency's assistance improved those conditions somewhat, many of the refugees were actively exploring ways to leave Lebanon; some were demanding to de-register from UNRWA in the belief that they would gain access to resettlement opportunities available to other refugees from Syria. Many of them preferred to return Syria, but that was not yet a viable option.

10. As the Agency awaited the imminent renewal of its mandate, tensions were rising within its workforce, with a renewed threat of strikes in multiple fields and the departure of nearly all its executive management team. Strong measures had been taken to steady the ship, generate positive momentum and introduce broad reforms. However, there were limits on what UNRWA could do on its own, hence the need for the financial support. The Agency remained an extremely effective and professional organization that used donor funds judiciously. The importance of its mandate must not be overshadowed or diminished in any way by the actions of a few individuals. The international community must therefore take decisive action in support of UNRWA in order to uphold the basic human rights and preserve the dignity of 5.5 million Palestine refugees. He was committed to guiding UNRWA through its current challenges.

Interactive dialogue

11. **Ms. Furman** (Israel), noting with concern the corruption and misconduct that had governed the operation of UNRWA in recent years, said that her delegation called for the full and transparent release of all findings of the investigation that was being conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services

(OIOS). The interim findings and the resignation of the former Commissioner-General corroborated her Government's claim that deep and comprehensive changes in the Agency's operational model were in order. For years, Israel had protested the Agency's lack of transparency and accountability, exemplified by its recruitment of Hamas members and the diversion of donor funding from humanitarian activities to political campaigns. Similarly, her country had long decried the joint Palestinian-UNRWA effort to inflate the number of refugees. Unlike the persons genuinely eligible for refugee status under the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which verified eligibility on a case-by-case basis, UNRWA registered as refugees all descendants of the Palestinians who had become refugees in 1948. While UNHCR worked to reduce the number of refugees by, inter alia, facilitating their resettlement and integration in third countries, UNRWA contributed to the political Palestinian narrative by inflating the number of so-called refugees, counting as refugees people who had resettled and become full citizens of other countries.

12. Public statements and other communications from UNRWA officials made apparent the Agency's political advocacy in the service of the Palestinian anti-Israel agenda. The persistent use of humanitarian funding to perpetuate a one-sided narrative of the conflict remained a source of deep concern for her Government. Moreover, the Agency's budgetary woes were the result not only of corruption but also of its broad definition of refugees and the unwillingness to resettle the refugees and their descendants.

13. The contradictory information supplied by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and UNRWA concerning the number of refugees registered with the Agency in Lebanon – 174,422 according to the former and over 470,000 according to the latter – was an example of the manipulation of figures in that regard. Her delegation wondered whether the larger number had been inflated in order to promote the political Palestinian agenda. It would also like to know why UNRWA kept on its books more than two million Agency beneficiaries who were citizens of other countries and whether a person who had resettled and acquired citizenship in another country should continue to be considered a refugee. Her delegation requested clarification on how the Agency intended to prevent the hiring of Hamas members and wondered whether such political activities as the right of return campaign – in the service of the Palestinian agenda – kept the parties from achieving a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

14. Israel hoped that, following the recent events, UNRWA would finally operate with transparency and accountability, focusing its efforts and donor money on fulfilling its mandate instead of promoting the political Palestinian narrative.

15. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that her delegation firmly rejected the politicization of the humanitarian mandate of UNRWA to address the plight of a people violently expelled from and denied the right to return to its homeland. Since its inception, the Agency had provided Palestine refugees with essential assistance, enabling them to lead productive lives and enjoy a measure of stability through waves of regional conflicts. It was therefore impossible to accept the distorted narratives targeting the Agency with the aim of extinguishing the refugees' rights.

16. The attempts by Israel to replace UNRWA education and health services in East Jerusalem were not a benign humanitarian gesture but another flagrant attempt to unlawfully impose its sovereignty on the occupied city and exploit a vulnerable population in the process. The Agency's Advisory Commission had expressed deep concern at the potential breach of the inviolability of United Nations installations by obstructing the provision of services by UNRWA in East Jerusalem. Her delegation sought further clarification on the matter as it related to the obligations of Israel vis-à-vis the Agency under the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations; the 1967 Comay-Michelmores Agreement and the relevant United Nations resolutions with regard to the status of Jerusalem; as well as the country's obligations as occupying Power under international humanitarian law. It would also welcome information on the implications for the Agency and the Palestine refugees it served in East Jerusalem.

17. **Mr. Saunders** (Officer-in-Charge, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)) said that the investigation launched by OIOS, a complex and lengthy process involving the review of over 1.2 million emails, was coming to a close. Member States had been briefed on the preliminary findings, with the full findings and the Agency's intended course of action to be made available once the investigation was completed. An internal review was already under way, and governance, management and programmatic reforms would be implemented over the coming months. However, it would be up to OIOS and the Secretary-General to decide whether the reports would be released to Member States.

18. UNRWA spent the funds provided by Member States on humanitarian and development activities only. The Agency intended to increase its transparency not only in response to the allegation that it inflated the number of refugees, but in other areas as well, releasing more information on its budget and expenditure into the public domain, to demonstrate that it had nothing to hide. It was his intention to make UNRWA the most transparent organization within the United Nations system over the coming year.

19. The charges on neutrality were somewhat unfair, given that the Agency did more than any other United Nations entity to provide staff with training and detailed policies and guidelines in that regard. When potential breaches of those policies were found, they were investigated robustly, and the perpetrators were subject to disciplinary action, including dismissal where appropriate.

20. He agreed with the representative of the State of Palestine that there had been issues surrounding UNRWA facilities in East Jerusalem and that the municipality had clearly expressed its wish to assume the Agency's function of providing services to Palestine refugees in East Jerusalem. UNRWA was discussing the matter with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

21. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that her delegation would like confirmation that the Agency did not register refugees of descendants from the female line in order to inflate the number of refugees. Were that the case, the actual number of Palestine refugees would be higher, not lower, than the number registered with the Agency.

22. **Mr. Saunders** (Officer-in-Charge, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)) said that the Agency did not register refugees from the woman's side of the family and the total number of refugees was probably underestimated.

23. **Ms. Furman** (Israel) asked whether people who had acquired citizenship and resettled and begun lives in another country remained registered with UNRWA or were taken off the Agency's books.

24. **Mr. Saunders** (Officer-in-Charge, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)) said that the Agency's mandate was to provide protection and assistance to Palestine refugees pending a just and lasting solution to their plight; determining who the Agency served was up to the General Assembly, not UNRWA. Eligibility for UNRWA services had never been contingent on the lack of nationality. Furthermore, conferral of refugee status and nationality under international law were matters

altogether separate from the question of eligibility and went beyond the Agency's mandate.

25. **Ms. Sutton** (United States of America) said that her Government remained deeply concerned about the allegations that had led to the ongoing OIOS inquiry and looked forward to the conclusion of a full and transparent investigation by the appropriate United Nations authorities. Noting that preliminary findings had excluded fraud or misappropriation of operational funds, her delegation urged that appropriate action be taken with regard to any substantiated misconduct and that the Secretary-General make available the results of the investigation. The findings should not be ignored because the persons under investigation had left the Agency.

26. Her delegation would like to know more about the Secretary-General's plans to install new leadership and ensure that departed leaders had not left behind a legacy that would trigger future OIOS investigations. More information would also be welcome on the alleged development of a culture of impunity at the highest levels of UNRWA, and on the Agency's plan to work constructively with its Advisory Commission and donors to increase transparency and address management issues in order to prevent similar situations in future.

27. **Mr. Saunders** (Officer-in-Charge, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)) said that fraud and misuse of donor funding had been conclusively ruled out by OIOS and that only management matters remained under investigation. Both the Secretariat and UNRWA would act decisively to address specific instances of misconduct. With regard to the legacy of departing executives, an internal Agency review was under way to identify areas where its already robust regulatory framework and oversight function could be further strengthened.

28. UNRWA shared many of the controls, regulations and rules that the Secretariat and other United Nations entities had in place, and the Agency had no culture of impunity. Moreover, its relatively light governance structure rendered UNRWA uniquely agile, enabling it to implement its own operational services. The structure should therefore be strengthened, not altered, by enhancing the Agency's reporting to the Advisory Commission and dialogue on programmatic and management issues. The Commissioner-General had the right to change a financial regulation or rule if deemed necessary and to recruit people outside the normal recruitment system, though the latter practice was very rare; increased reporting on such decisions to the

Advisory Commission and explanation of the need for them would promote greater transparency and strengthen controls within the Agency.

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

29. **Ms. Arif** (Norway), introducing the report of the Working Group (A/74/337), said that the Agency was facing a significant financial shortfall that threatened the human development of Palestine refugees and stability in the region. Despite measures to improve the cost-effectiveness of the Agency's programmes and additional contributions from several traditional and non-traditional donors, there was currently a shortfall of \$89 million in the programme budget. The General Assembly and the international community were responsible for ensuring that the Agency could fulfil its mandate and maintain its services at an acceptable level.

30. The Working Group urged all Governments to increase their contributions to the Agency, particularly to its programme budget, and to sustain them over several years. Contributions should reflect appropriate international burden-sharing and be swiftly disbursed, keeping pace with the growing needs of the Palestine refugee population and taking into account the effects of inflation and other cost factors.

31. Noting the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the operations of UNRWA (A/74/307) and all resolutions relating to Agency financing intended to address recurring budget deficits and support the Agency's vital work, the Working Group commended UNRWA for its efforts to increase efficiency while maintaining the quality of its services to Palestine refugees. It urged all Governments to provide unearmarked multi-year funding where possible, make sustained and predictable contributions to UNRWA in line with the recommendations made at the World Humanitarian Summit, and disburse their contributions early in the year when feasible. The Working Group invited all Member States to consider those recommendations when assessing possible UNRWA funding in 2019 and beyond. The Agency had made progress in containing its costs, and the Working Group encouraged Member States to accompany those measures with adequate funding for UNRWA.

General debate

32. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that UNRWA continued to exist because of the injustice long borne by the Palestinian people; the responsibility of the international community as a result of the General Assembly's decision to partition Mandate

Palestine in 1947, the 1948 Nakbah and subsequent events; and the continued absence of a just solution to the Palestine refugee question. For those very reasons, appeals for support remained necessary to enable the Agency to fulfil its mandate to assist Palestine refugees. Regrettably, those truths were too often lost in the rush to politicize the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, whose root causes were ignored, while Israel was permitted to act as a State above the law, grossly violating Palestinian rights with impunity and resorting to rhetoric to nullify the rights of the refugees, defame the champions of those rights and discredit UNRWA. Her delegation rejected the libellous claims by Israel and recalled that no unilateral decision by a country could terminate the Agency's mandate. As a subsidiary of the General Assembly – which alone maintained authority over the Agency – UNRWA remained a collective expression of the international community's shared responsibility.

33. With regard to the recent allegations of misconduct, her delegation took note of the conclusion of the investigation and underscored that no fraud, corruption or misuse of funds had been found. Moreover, the alleged misconduct had not impaired the Agency's ability to deliver assistance to refugees. The management plan recently announced by the Secretary-General to address certain weaknesses in oversight and accountability should further reassure the international community. Moreover, the swift appointment of an Officer-in-Charge had ensured continuity at UNRWA after the resignation of the former Commissioner-General.

34. While the State of Palestine regretted the recent events, the instrumentalization of those events to undermine the Agency's humanitarian mission must be stopped, and attention should be refocused on renewing the mandate of and securing more sustained, predictable and sufficient funding for the Agency. As a just solution of the Palestine refugee question remained elusive, owing to denial by Israel of the Palestinian people's rights, it was widely acknowledged that UNRWA remained indispensable. Her delegation welcomed the long-standing international support for the Agency's mandate, which had enabled it to provide basic services and emergency aid to millions of refugees, along with a vital measure of hope. Moreover, UNRWA contributed to regional stability in tangible ways, its role increasingly essential against the backdrop of regional turmoil.

35. As host countries, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria had provided support to refugee communities and facilitated UNRWA operations. Donor countries, institutions and organizations had provided generous voluntary contributions to the Agency. The members and

observers of the Advisory Commission and the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA had lent support and guidance to the Agency, while the Secretary-General's leadership in mobilizing funding for UNRWA had been key in alleviating the Agency's financial crisis. Her delegation was proud that the Agency's workforce, widely regarded as the provider of an effective, hybrid model of humanitarian and development assistance, was composed primarily of Palestine refugees serving their communities, often at risk to their own lives.

36. Her delegation appealed for pledges to be fulfilled, for suspended assistance to be renewed and for support to be enhanced if possible, as the Agency's significant shortfall persisted. Such funding would be vital to the continued operation and financial health of UNRWA. In addition to assistance, Palestine refugees remained in need of reassurance that they were not being abandoned, nor were their rights being forsaken, by the world. Diminished support would weaken their faith in the international community's resolve to remedy their plight, a faith that had anchored their resilience and prevented the crisis from inflaming the region. The deterioration of socioeconomic conditions in the Agency's fields of operation was straining the Palestine refugee communities' capacity to cope. Moreover, the increasing marginalization and hardship among refugee families were eroding the belief of Palestine refugees, especially the young, that peace and a better life were possible, making them vulnerable to the lure of radical extremist forces. By providing education, health care, vocational training, microfinance, psychosocial support and aid to the destitute, UNRWA had acted as a salve for despair, fostering resilience and hope in a more just future.

37. In closing, her delegation reaffirmed its belief that the rights of the Palestine refugees, including the right of return, were inalienable and would not be diminished by the passage of time or by cynical rhetoric and manoeuvres. Only the realization of those rights, in accordance with international law, could alter the legal status of the Palestine refugees. Her delegation called on the international community to act responsibly to achieve a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and, until then, to maintain its solidarity with Palestine refugees, including by revitalizing its support for UNRWA.

38. **Ms. Baghirova** (Azerbaijan), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that the Movement deeply appreciated the essential assistance provided by UNRWA to the Palestine refugees. The Agency's humanitarian mission remained vital in view of the growing needs of the refugee population and the instability affecting all fields of

operation in the region, in particular the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, resulting from the continued violations committed by Israel.

39. The Movement likewise commended the Agency's staff for their bravery and dedication under adverse circumstances. It noted that, in its investigation into allegations of misconduct by UNRWA senior staff, OIOS had found that no fraud, corruption or misuse of funds had occurred. The Movement was reassured by the administrative measures taken by the Secretary-General in that connection, including the appointment of an Officer-in-Charge.

40. The Movement firmly supported the Agency's mandate and operations, which were essential to the achievement of a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, including the plight of the refugees. The support of the international community, including host countries, was essential to ensure the continuity of services, particularly in the light of the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and instability in the region, and the recurrent financial shortfalls facing the Agency. Sustained, predictable and uninterrupted support must therefore be provided to UNRWA as a matter of priority.

41. The Movement deeply regretted the exacerbation of the severe funding crisis facing the Agency as a result of the punitive, unjustified decision by the Government of the United States to discontinue its contributions, a decision that not only affected the most vulnerable of the Palestinian people and the provision of humanitarian and development assistance, but also threatened regional stability. The Movement expressed concern over the announcement by the Israeli authorities of their intention to terminate UNRWA service provision in occupied East Jerusalem, and called for respect of the Charter of the United Nations and the privileges and immunities of the Organization.

42. In 2019, UNRWA had faced challenges in its efforts to protect the Palestine refugees as a result of the volatility and violence in the region, as well as the marginalization and poverty affecting the refugees. Those challenges had been compounded by the Israeli occupation, under which the Palestinian people, including refugees, faced armed violence, collective punishment and forced displacement. The plight of the refugees had also been exacerbated by ongoing crises in the region, including the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, which had intensified the need for humanitarian assistance and had resulted in the flight of thousands of refugees to other countries.

43. The Movement was deeply concerned at the illegal Israeli practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which continued to affect the well-being of the Palestine refugees. The continuation by Israel of activities aimed at expanding its illegal settlements, including forced displacements, settler violence and demolition of homes and economic assets, had entrenched its occupation of Palestine land, violating the rights of the Palestinian people and undermining the prospects of a just and lasting solution.

44. The illegal blockade of Gaza imposed by Israel continued to inflict inestimable harm on the Palestinian people by obstructing the delivery of humanitarian assistance and basic supplies; hindering the reconstruction of vital infrastructure, including refugee shelters and camps; hampering economic and social recovery; and increasing dependence on UNRWA assistance to mitigate the poverty and food insecurity affecting over 80 per cent of the Gaza population. The crisis in Gaza must be addressed comprehensively, in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, as part of efforts to end the illegitimate Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Similarly, the illegal blockade of Gaza should be lifted immediately in order to enable the Palestine refugees in Gaza to reduce their dependence on UNRWA.

45. The restrictions on movement and access imposed on Palestine refugees and Agency staff in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, were also deeply troubling. The Non-Aligned Movement urged Israel to fulfil its obligations under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, to enable UNRWA to carry out its responsibilities freely and without impediments or additional costs. Full respect for the inviolability of all United Nations premises and installations must also be ensured.

46. The Movement commended the support provided by several of its members to UNRWA, urged current donors to increase their contributions, and encouraged Member States which had not yet done so to make contributions and also to support all draft resolutions under the current agenda item, including the draft resolution on assistance to Palestine refugees (A/C.4/74/L.10), which provided for the extension of the Agency's mandate until 2023. The Movement was committed to ensuring a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, and to supporting the Palestinian people in their efforts to achieve justice; realize their inalienable rights to self-

determination, freedom and independence; and establish an independent and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

47. **Mr. Pontiroli** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia and, in addition, the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina, said that the European Union deeply appreciated the work and staff of UNRWA. The European Union was committed to the achievement of a just and comprehensive two-State solution that ended the occupation which had begun in 1967 and fulfilled Israeli and Palestinian security needs as well as Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. The European Union stood ready to work with the international community to ensure the resumption of meaningful negotiations aimed at resolving all final-status issues and achieving a just and lasting peace.

48. It was important for UNRWA to be able to continue providing Palestine refugees with essential protection and services and to build their resilience. In that connection, the European Union would continue to support the Agency in all its fields of operation, including East Jerusalem. UNRWA provided critical health and education services to millions of Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, and was a stabilizing force in the region. In that regard, the European Union deeply appreciated the support of host countries for the Agency and the welfare of the refugees.

49. As the largest collective contributor to the Agency's budget, the European Union was committed to providing strong and predictable political and financial support to UNRWA, which was to be commended for its efforts to improve its management and efficiency. In 2019, the European Union and its member States had again responded to the Agency's call for additional funds; it welcomed the additional financial support provided by other donors and called on all partners to make multi-year contributions. Lastly, the European Union supported the extension of the Agency's mandate until 2023.

50. **Ms. Bahous** (Jordan) said that although the adoption of General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) had given hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees hope for a better life after being expelled from their homes, those refugees continued to wait, in misery and

despair, for a solution to their predicament. The issue of Palestinian refugees and UNRWA was a major foreign policy priority of Jordan, not only because the country was host to approximately 42 per cent of UNRWA-registered Palestinian refugees, but also out of a conviction that the Palestinian issue was a primary moral concern of the Arab people that could only be addressed through Arab, Islamic and humanitarian principles. Accordingly, Jordan had made every effort to marshal political and financial support globally for the Agency so that it could carry out its mandate, which included protecting the rights of refugees to education, health care and social services.

51. Given the pivotal role it played in the Middle East and its contribution to regional stability, the Agency must not be made to suffer as a result of differing political opinions. Depriving millions of refugees of their rights or whittling away the UNRWA mandate would have dangerous repercussions for stability in the region and beyond. Withholding UNRWA services would deepen feelings of despair and frustration and would leave young people prey to the forces of ignorance and extremism. Jordan understood the depth of the suffering among the refugees, as Jordanians shared their homes, food and classrooms with them. Jordanians understood what UNRWA meant to Palestinians and had seen its positive impacts with their own eyes.

52. In the 70 years since its founding, UNRWA had contributed to millions of success stories and had helped transform despair into hope. Jordan commended UNRWA officials for proactively planning to improve management and decision-making processes at all levels of the Agency, even before the conclusion of the ongoing investigations. Such efforts would help the Agency to achieve its goals pending a just solution to the refugee problem. Jordan commended the positive contributions of many friendly countries to help the Agency reduce its fiscal gap to \$89 million in 2019. It urged all countries to fulfil their pledges as soon as possible to ensure that UNRWA would continue to provide its services during the coming months. A vote to extend the UNRWA mandate would give children hope and would show that the international community would not abandon millions of Palestinians.

53. **Mr. Srivihok** (Thailand) said that the work of UNRWA remained critical, given the humanitarian crisis faced by the Palestinian people. The unpredictable and unsustainable nature of funding had undermined the Agency's humanitarian programmes and had had dire consequences for the Palestine refugees. UNRWA should therefore explore innovative means of securing sustainable financing, including by diversifying its

donor base. The international community should also increase its contributions to the Agency to enable it to fulfil its mandate. Thailand had consistently made financial contributions to UNRWA since 1978 and had responded to the appeal to help those affected by the devastating conflict in the Gaza Strip in 2014. It would continue to fulfil its commitment to make significant contributions to the Agency for the period from 2017 to 2021, which it hoped would help to improve the predictability of funding.

54. UNRWA must ensure that its systems, structures and staff were adequate to help it manage the risks it faced and to fulfil its mandate. Thailand supported the extension of that mandate, with the understanding that improving the Agency's effectiveness was essential to addressing its financial situation. Thailand thus commended the Agency's efforts to strengthen its management capacity and maximize resource utilization in order to meet the growing needs of the Palestine refugees.

55. Member States should support UNRWA to enable it to continue its work without interruption. To improve the humanitarian situation of the Palestine refugees, the Thailand International Cooperation Agency had provided training to Palestinians on such issues as public health, waste management and food security. Moreover, in July 2019, representatives of Thailand had attended the meeting of senior officials of the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, aimed at monitoring the progress made in support of socioeconomic development and capacity-building in Palestine since the third ministerial meeting of the Conference, co-hosted by the Governments of Thailand and Japan in 2018.

56. The solution to the crisis lay in the elimination of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself. Thailand would thus support international efforts to find a mutually agreed and peaceful solution to the conflict, in order to bring an end to the suffering of the Palestine refugees and promote stability in the region and the world.

57. **Mr. Al-Mouallimi** (Saudi Arabia) said that since its inception, UNRWA had been providing outstanding services to the more than 5.5 million Palestinian refugees who continued to face increased humanitarian and economic suffering as a result of high rates of food insecurity, poverty, displacement, despair and unemployment caused by the Israeli blockade and other illegal activities carried out since 1967 in the occupied State of Palestine.

58. Saudi Arabia provided great political, economic and humanitarian support to the Palestinian people and

was proud to be one of the largest donors to UNRWA. From 2000 to 2019, Saudi Arabia had donated nearly \$900 million to support the programmes of UNRWA, and its total assistance to Palestine had reached approximately \$7 billion. Saudi Arabia called on the international community to support the renewal of the UNRWA mandate and to resist any attempts to attack or damage the Agency. The gap in funding for the Agency's growing services should be bridged by increased support from donors and financial institutions and through other additional funding channels.

59. The refugee question lay at the heart of the Palestinian issue as whole. It was not so much a humanitarian crisis as a political crisis, which could be addressed only by ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories. In accordance with United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, a Palestinian State should be established based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, allowing the Palestinian people to return to their homeland. The inalienable human and moral right of return of the Palestinians and their descendants had no expiration date.

60. **Mr. Namazu** (Japan) said that the recent allegations of misconduct against the management of UNRWA were a matter of concern. Once OIOS had finalized its report on the findings of its investigation, the Organization should transparently address the issues identified. Despite the difficulties occasioned by the resignation of its former Commissioner-General, the Agency continued to play a critical role in providing humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees and in promoting stability in the region.

61. Noting that OIOS had found that no fraud or misappropriation of funds had occurred, Japan would continue to provide multidimensional support to UNRWA. It had already contributed more than \$32 million in 2019 and would soon provide additional assistance of approximately \$11 million for activities related to education, water and sanitation, and food. UNRWA should expand its donor base in order to bridge its funding gap. In 2013, Japan, in conjunction with regional partners, had initiated the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, aimed at leveraging the resources and experiences of East Asian countries to support the economic development of Palestine.

62. The Agency's efforts to improve efficiency and reduce costs, while ensuring transparency and accountability, were laudable and would help to attract contributions. UNRWA should continue to reform its management in order to ensure its sustainable operation.

The renewal of the Agency's mandate was important to enable it to continue to perform its important work.

63. **Ms. Almuraikhi** (Qatar) said that UNRWA continued to perform a vital role in support of Palestinian refugees pending the peaceful resolution to their cause and the fulfilment of the right of return, in line with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). It provided health, primary and secondary education, food, housing and social services to more than 5 million Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. That assistance allowed them to enjoy their basic human rights and a decent standard of living.

64. It was therefore necessary to ensure sustainable funding for UNRWA so that it could carry out those duties without interruption, in accordance with its mandate. Qatar had increased its funding to UNRWA through a multi-year pledge of \$8 million annually, in addition to the \$50 million in assistance it had announced in 2018, which had been a major factor in ensuring the immediate opening of schools. It had also provided over \$1 billion in humanitarian and development aid to the Palestinians over the previous eight years, which had helped to support improvements in the electrical system and other infrastructure, the construction of houses, road repairs and expanded job opportunities, thereby contributing to economic revitalization, stability and the creation of an environment conducive to peace.

65. **Mr. Al-Daweesh** (Kuwait) said that, given the positive developments recorded by UNRWA in response to the challenges it faced, as mentioned in the report of the Commissioner-General (A/74/13), its mandate should be renewed for an additional three years. Kuwait was keen to maintain its support for the Agency so that it could continue providing services to refugees, including in education, health, food aid and other basic necessities. Kuwait appreciated the assurances provided by the Secretary-General to donor countries regarding the recent allegations levelled at certain Agency officials and hoped that they would not impede the delivery of services to Palestinian refugees.

66. Seventy years had passed since the founding of UNRWA, which meant that three generations of Palestinian refugees had suffered under Israeli policies that were disruptive to all aspects of their daily lives. Kuwait therefore called on the international community to make sincere efforts to end the suffering of the Palestinians and improve their living conditions.

67. The occupation authorities should be compelled to respect their obligations under international law and international human rights law, lift the embargo on the

Gaza Strip and end all restrictions on the movement of citizens and goods in the occupied territories, pending a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question in line with United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. Israel must therefore retreat from all occupied Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories to the June 1967 borders, and the Palestinian people must be granted their legitimate political rights, including the right to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

68. *Mr. Pindják (Slovakia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

69. **Mr. Mabhongo** (South Africa) said that despite extremely trying circumstances, UNRWA provided invaluable support to the Palestinian people, who faced significant obstacles in their struggle to achieve self-determination. As a long-standing friend of the Palestinian people, South Africa appreciated the critical humanitarian and development assistance that UNRWA provided to Palestine refugees. In the absence of a political solution to the conflict, the international community had a moral obligation to uphold its express commitment to support those refugees.

70. The shortfall of \$200 million in the Agency's budget was a matter of concern. The decision by the Government of the United States to discontinue its contributions threatened the lives of the most vulnerable and undermined the progress achieved towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The United States should uphold its commitment to support UNRWA. The international community must also provide the necessary financial support to UNRWA. For its part, his Government continued to make financial contributions to the Agency. It also provided humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people through the India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation. For example, in cooperation with the Palestinian authorities and other international organizations, it was supporting initiatives to empower persons with disabilities in Nablus, as well as the rehabilitation of a Palestine Red Crescent Society hospital and cultural centre in the Gaza Strip. The blockade of Gaza should be lifted to allow its economy, in particular the fishing industry, to be rehabilitated.

71. The humanitarian situation affecting Palestine refugees must be addressed as a shared international responsibility. To that end, the parties must be encouraged to resume negotiations in order to end the illegal Israeli occupation and resolve the conflict peacefully, ensuring the existence of a contiguous Palestinian State living side by side with Israel, within internationally recognized borders.

72. **Mr. Alshamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that his country welcomed UNRWA efforts to assist the more than 5.5 million Palestinian refugees living in difficult humanitarian conditions. The United Arab Emirates was a major contributor to UNRWA, motivated by the country's historic solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support for urgent humanitarian causes around the world. The Agency played an essential role in protecting the rights and dignity of Palestinian refugees and in securing a better future for them, especially through its excellent educational programmes, which enabled young people to become productive members of their communities. UNRWA also contributed to regional stability and security and supported local development efforts.

73. The international community should provide further support to the Agency so that it could continue to offer its vital services. In that context, the United Arab Emirates had maintained its level of support during the Agency's 2018 and 2019 financial crises, donating a total of \$100 million in addition to its voluntary annual contributions. Over the past five years, it had also provided more than \$630 million to fund many vital sectors in Palestine, including education and health. The United Arab Emirates was also currently the Vice-Chair of the UNRWA Advisory Commission and supported continued efforts towards a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the refugee issue in accordance with internationally agreed standards and relevant United Nations resolutions.

74. **Ms. Hussain** (Maldives) said that, by providing humanitarian assistance and a broad range of vital services, UNRWA played a crucial role in alleviating the suffering and ensuring the resilience of Palestine refugees, as well as in enabling them to lead dignified lives.

75. The allegations of misconduct against certain UNRWA staff should be swiftly investigated, in accordance with United Nations rules and regulations, to ensure that the Agency was more transparent, accountable and efficient. Maldives was deeply concerned at the unprecedented funding shortfall facing the Agency, which had forced it to make changes to its emergency response initiatives in order to ensure that the most vulnerable refugees continued to receive humanitarian assistance. UNRWA should continue the measures that it had taken to address the funding shortfall, keep pace with inflation, and cope with the increasing refugee population, while continuing to provide high-quality services. Her delegation welcomed the financial support provided by several Member States to address the funding gap and hoped that the gap would be bridged expeditiously.

76. The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination was a priority for her country. Accordingly, Maldives called for an internationally agreed two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a sovereign and independent Palestine.

77. **Mr. Gertze** (Namibia) said that Namibia was concerned at the hardship faced by Palestine refugees as a result of armed violence, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, the inhumane blockade of Gaza, evictions and home demolitions in the West Bank, and at the movement restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities, including in East Jerusalem. The Israeli settlements in the occupied areas violated the rights of Palestine refugees under international law, particularly Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), in which those settlements were described as undermining the achievement of a two-State solution, a pre-requisite for the attainment of peace and security in the region. Namibia was also concerned at the proposed extension of Israeli sovereignty to the Jordan Valley, recalling that annexation of any form was strictly prohibited under international law. Israel should therefore immediately cease all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

78. Namibia was disappointed at the recent announcement by the Jerusalem municipal government of its intention to terminate UNRWA activities in occupied East Jerusalem. The security threats and attacks against UNRWA personnel in conflict areas, as well as the restrictions imposed on them by Israeli forces in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, were matters of great concern, particularly given the financial challenges facing the Agency. Those actions seriously undermined the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, as well as the efforts of the Palestinian people to realize their rights to self-determination and freedom, and to establish an independent State of Palestine within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Those actions also demonstrated a complete disregard for humanity on the part of the Israeli authorities.

79. Namibia acknowledged the Agency's efforts to keep schools and clinics open and to provide vital services, despite the challenges it faced. The well-being, development and protection of Palestine refugees depended on UNRWA, and Namibia supported the renewal of its mandate. His delegation was grateful to the two Palestinian students who had participated in the annual pledging conference held in June 2019; they had demonstrated the importance of preserving the education of Palestine refugees, a fundamental human right. His delegation also welcomed the decision by the

Organization of Islamic Cooperation in March 2019 to establish a waqf endowment fund in support of UNRWA at the Islamic Development Bank.

80. **Mr. Rivero Rosario** (Cuba) said that the lack of a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the funding shortfall affecting assistance programmes, had given rise to fear and concern for the future of Palestine refugees. His delegation paid tribute to UNRWA staff, who had achieved significant progress with few resources and had brought a message of hope to Palestine refugees. Their work was all the more commendable in view of the hostile environment in which they operated, characterized by the firing of live ammunition, bombardment, destruction and the commission of abuses against the population by the Israeli occupation forces. His delegation was also grateful to host and donor countries, including the Arab States of the Gulf, as well as regional and international organizations, for their essential financial support to UNRWA.

81. The allegations of misconduct against UNRWA senior officials represented an attempt to undermine the Agency's work, affecting not only the Agency itself but also the refugees it served. Following its investigation, OIOS had found that neither fraud nor corruption nor misuse of funds had occurred, and that the alleged misconduct had not prejudiced the Agency's education, health and social-services programmes. Those findings had helped to restore international confidence in UNRWA, which had consistently striven to carry out its work in an exemplary manner.

82. It was remarkable that, despite operating with a deficit and having faced first reductions and then the complete discontinuation of funding from its largest contributor, and even the suspension of financing for some hospitals in its fields of operation, UNRWA had been able to fulfil its mandate and was expected to overcome its deficit by end-2019. It was regrettable that the Agency's largest contributor had attempted to stifle its humanitarian work, using ridiculous reasons, untenable legal arguments and claims which had no basis in the history of UNRWA. There had been an attempt to carry out a campaign of misrepresentations in order to change how Palestine refugees were defined, registered and counted. Moreover, pressure and financial blackmail had been used in an attempt to break the will of the Palestinian people, who had demonstrated, throughout the Israeli occupation, their courage, patriotism and conviction in the justness of their cause. Nevertheless, the attempts by the Agency's largest contributor to put it out of existence had failed, and UNRWA had continued to perform its work. Member States should support the renewal of the

Agency's mandate and demonstrate political will to ensure that it had adequate, predictable and sustained funding.

83. The current conditions, characterized by worsening conflicts, would only complicate the volatile situation in the region, where Palestine refugees faced increasing violence, marginalization, displacement and poverty. Cuba would continue to support a comprehensive, just and lasting two-State solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, enabling the Palestinians to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish a free, independent and sovereign State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as their right of return.

84. **Ms. Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the Palestinian refugee question was more a political, legal and moral responsibility of the international community than a humanitarian responsibility. Failure by the United Nations to ensure the implementation of its many resolutions relating to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III), adopted in 1948, had encouraged Israel to continue to systematically expel Palestinians from their land and to deny them the right to return to their homes.

85. Syria hosted Palestinian refugees on its territory, providing them with support and services, treating them the same way it did its citizens, and would continue to do so until they were able to return to their homeland in accordance with United Nations resolutions. Syria had also facilitated the work of UNRWA and other aid agencies providing services of various types to Palestinians. It would spare no effort in protecting Palestinian refugees present on its territory and helping them secure a decent life. Their suffering was the result of aggression on the part of the armed terrorist groups that had occupied their camps and attacked their inhabitants, used them as human shields, confiscated their property and denied access to humanitarian relief, causing a great humanitarian crisis until the Syrian Arab Army was able to liberate the camps. That suffering was part of an agenda to displace them once again in order to prevent them from exercising their right to return to their homes. Israel had been and remained the sole cause of the distress of the Palestinian people, having expelled them from their homes under the threat of death and terror. Israel had not been content to merely turn them into refugees for decades but had even pursued them at their places of refuge.

86. In order to be able to continue to perform its duties and provide services to all Palestinian refugees, UNRWA must receive adequate and sustainable funding. Syrian spending on Palestinian refugees had reached

approximately 59 billion Syrian lira in 2018 and the Government, which had provided the necessary support and facilities to UNRWA, categorically rejected the discontinuation of its education, health care, food aid and social services, which would be a violation of international law and United Nations resolutions, and any transfer of UNRWA services to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or any other organization or agency. The United Nations must take immediate steps to close the gap in the UNRWA budget, which had been caused by funding cuts and freezes, including working with donor countries to secure adequate and sustained funding.

87. **Mr. Umar** (Nigeria) said that his delegation commended UNRWA for delivering broad-ranging humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees and supported the rights of Palestine refugees, as well as the mandate and operations of UNRWA. It called for a just and speedy resolution to the lingering question of Palestine refugees in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. In the absence of a political solution to the conflict, the continuation of the Agency's activities would be essential to address the needs of the refugees, promote United Nations values and the Sustainable Development Goals and maintain stability in the region.

88. East Jerusalem was part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and was thus included in the Agency's mandated area of operation. The recent attempt by the occupying Power to terminate UNRWA service provision in East Jerusalem, in particular its proposal to replace UNRWA schools in the area with alternative schools, was thus counterproductive and ran counter to relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The broader efforts by Israel to assert its authority over East Jerusalem further undermined the Agency's mandate.

89. The alarming humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the near collapse of its infrastructure as a result of the Israeli blockade and military action should be of serious concern to the international community. That blockade should be lifted, and the freedom of movement, human rights and dignity of all Palestinians, including refugees, should be respected in accordance with international humanitarian law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

90. Resolving the question of Palestine refugees was tied to broader Middle East peace. His delegation therefore called on all parties to work closely with the United Nations and its agencies to achieve the shared objective of a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine existing side by side on the basis of pre-1967

borders. It also called on States with influence over the concerned parties to encourage them to re-engage in dialogue based on relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and other existing agreements. Furthermore, his delegation encouraged Israel to take concrete steps to freeze and reverse all settlement-related activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). It was clear that unilateral actions would not resolve the long-drawn-out conflict.

91. Nigeria reaffirmed its support for the rights of the Palestinian people, particularly their right to freedom of movement, self-determination, dignity and access to religious sites in occupied East Jerusalem, as well as their inalienable right to live without fear of persecution in pursuit of their political, economic, social, cultural and religious aspirations.

92. **Mr. Baati** (Tunisia) said that his delegation commended UNRWA for alleviating the suffering of Palestinian refugees and providing them with education, health, relief and social assistance programmes, especially in the light of the continued deterioration in the Agency's financial situation. Furthermore, any narrowing of the scope of its mandate would potentially complicate the situation on the ground and lead to instability throughout the region.

93. Tunisia welcomed the support of donors and host countries for the Agency's activities; more concerted international and regional efforts were needed to ensure sustained and predictable funding for the Agency. Tunisia also supported efforts to develop innovative resource mobilization schemes, particularly partnerships with international and regional financial institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations. In that context, it welcomed the decision of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to establish a waqf fund to support Palestinian refugees.

94. The preliminary investigations into the operations of UNRWA had disproved allegations of corruption or misuse of the Agency's financial resources and had shown that only administrative issues needed to be addressed, which did not affect the substance of its mandate.

95. The renewal of the Agency's mandate would enable it to continue to play its vital role, pending a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian refugee issue within the framework of final-status negotiations. Tunisia called on the international community to focus its efforts on achieving a just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli

conflict on the basis of the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution, which provided for an independent and sovereign Palestinian State established on basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

96. **Ms. Samarasinghe** (Sri Lanka) said that her delegation welcomed the efforts of UNRWA to strengthen its management, particularly in the areas of governance, oversight and accountability, and to address the needs of Palestine refugees in accordance with international law. Sri Lanka welcomed the administrative measures taken by the Secretary-General in response to the allegations of misconduct against UNRWA personnel, and was confident that the necessary corrective action would be taken to ensure the Agency's adherence to the highest standards of professionalism, transparency and efficiency, while granting it the operational agility required to fulfil its mandate. Given the invaluable services provided by UNRWA, her delegation urged Member States to separate the administrative issues affecting the Agency from the political, financial and humanitarian support it provided to Palestinian refugees. In that regard, Sri Lanka supported the renewal of the Agency's mandate.

97. In view of reports of children's right to education being curtailed in Gaza and the West Bank, Sri Lanka welcomed the Agency's efforts to maintain schools and educational infrastructure in the occupied territories in order to help young people resist violence and give them hope for the future. Her delegation also regretted reports that arrests of children were on the rise and that children continued to suffer from ill treatment during arrest and detention.

98. As Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, Sri Lanka was deeply concerned at the human rights situation in those Territories. It was especially troubled by reports that large numbers of children had been killed or injured during demonstrations or as a result of air strikes, shelling and opening of fire in access-restricted areas on land and at sea. Moreover, as a result of the blockade and repeated escalation of hostilities in Gaza, the enclave's population faced many challenges, including limited educational opportunities, unemployment, gender-based violence, poverty, lack of electricity and inadequate access to health care. It was a testament to the resolve of the Palestinian people that they continued to hope for a better future.

99. The efforts of UNRWA staff to fulfil the Agency's mandate under dangerous circumstances were commendable. Sri Lanka condemned the killing of United Nations personnel, threats and attacks against UNRWA personnel and the destruction of United Nations premises. Sri Lanka was also concerned at the growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, as well as their increased vulnerability and poverty, trends which had affected the Agency's budget.

100. The future of Palestine refugees must be secured through a just and peaceful political settlement. In that regard, General Assembly resolutions on the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to statehood, and on the attainment of a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, should be implemented.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.