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Chair: Mr. Bhattarai (Nepal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 50: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
(A/69/13, A/69/345, A/69/349, A/69/351 and A/69/391)

1. **The Chair** said that the war in Gaza in July and August 2014, the four-year conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and tensions in Lebanon and the West Bank all constituted the environment in which UNRWA had to operate on behalf of the international community, providing much-needed services to the Palestine refugee population until a just and lasting solution was found to the question of the refugees. Needless to say, UNRWA depended on the international community's full support to fulfil its mandate, especially at such a time of crisis.

Statement by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA

2. **Mr. Krähenbühl** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) said that the Palestine refugee community currently totalled 5.1 million — under a third of the world's total refugee population and some 40 per cent of its long-term refugees. Although United Nations resolutions on Palestine had always suggested the temporary nature of the situation of its refugees, the international community still awaited the constructive relief measures referred to in General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of 1949; it awaited the just settlement stipulated in Security Council resolution 242 (1967), or the peace negotiations provided for in Council resolution 338 (1973).

3. UNRWA was currently supplying close to a million people in the Gaza Strip with food aid, given the drastic deterioration in living conditions over the previous year. To add to their misery, refugees and non-refugees alike were just emerging from the unprecedented violence and destruction of the summer's 50-day conflict. The world had been shocked by the killing of over 1,500 civilians in Gaza, sixty per cent of them women and children, and 11 of them UNRWA staff members. It had witnessed widespread traumatisation of survivors and their loss of homes and livelihoods. At the peak of the crisis, almost a third of Gaza's population had fled their homes, UNRWA alone having sheltered almost 300,000 displaced persons in 90 of its schools. Shockingly, UNRWA schools had been fired on in seven incidents, causing scores of deaths and hundreds of injuries. The Agency had unreservedly condemned those attacks on United

Nations premises, which were violations of international law by Israel, and had called for investigations and accountability. It had also discovered weapons components hidden in three of its schools by locals and had been quick to inform all key parties and publicly condemn those violations of international law as well.

4. The International Conference on Palestine — Reconstructing Gaza, held in Cairo in October, had produced significant pledges to rebuild Gaza, and it was urgent to secure them: UNRWA was seeking \$1.68 billion for reconstruction or repair of homes and infrastructure, and for essential relief, food and temporary shelter for those in need. Other United Nations agencies also required financial assistance to support non-refugees.

5. It was now essential that the international community support the Palestinian Government of National Consensus as it led the way in reconstructing Gaza. In order for major rebuilding to take place, there had to be a massive expansion of commercial traffic through the crossing points into Gaza, and that required the swift implementation of the United Nations-brokered temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism agreed between the Israeli and Palestinian Governments. In addition, exports from Gaza, reduced to virtually zero in recent years under the blockade, needed to be resumed. Without rapid progress on those two tracks, Gaza would continue its precipitous slide, with growing unemployment, a total lack of prospects particularly for young people, increased aid dependency and worse poverty.

6. With winter approaching, the beleaguered people of Gaza absolutely had to see progress on the ground, with building sites and rubble cleared, and at least 7,000 explosive items left in the rubble urgently secured and destroyed by the United Nations Mine Action Service. Meeting those challenges would require all stakeholders to live up to their responsibilities and be held accountable if the movement of supplies into Gaza was impeded or not facilitated in good faith.

7. UNRWA would continue to assist the over 30,000 displaced persons remaining in 18 schools and provide rental subsidies and support to others pending the rebuilding of their homes. It was immensely grateful to its many donors and to the private sector, which had funded 75 per cent of its \$300-million emergency

appeal. UNRWA was also deeply touched by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Malala Yousufzai's decision to donate the entire proceeds of her award to rebuild an UNRWA school damaged during the recent fighting.

8. However, nowhere in the world did the provision of humanitarian assistance alone make up for the denial of human rights, the opportunity of a job to provide for family members and the chance to live in freedom and self-sufficiency. Many examples illustrated the highly fragile psychological and physical state of the people of Gaza, one of which was the readiness of growing numbers to risk their lives in the hands of human traffickers in search of a new beginning in Europe.

9. The only way to overcome that despair was to make Gaza a liveable place again; that meant once and for all addressing the underlying causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through determined political action and a complete change of paradigm, by ending the occupation that had ground on for nearly half a century and fully lifting the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip.

10. In the West Bank, the situation of the 750,000 Palestine refugees in 19 camps had also deteriorated over the past year. In 2013, despite the intense efforts to achieve a negotiated peace, UNRWA had noted a significant upsurge in violence against Palestinians and Palestine refugees, a trend which had worsened in 2014. Much of UNRWA's protection work in the West Bank was in response to Israel's forcible displacement of persons from occupied land, a breach of international humanitarian law. Many of the 7000 displaced were pastoral Bedouin refugees, for whom imposed urban living would sever their ancient traditions and destroy their way of life. Socioeconomic conditions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, had continued to deteriorate. The systematic restrictions on movement of Palestinians and on trade had caused widespread poverty and unemployment, compounded by pressures from further illegal settlement-building.

11. Adding to the challenges facing UNRWA was the high level of conflict and instability in the countries hosting Palestine refugees, creating a dynamic of insecurity not experienced by refugees in decades. Prior to the armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, Palestine refugees there had enjoyed safe refuge and a range of rights and freedoms. Currently — in a conflict in which all sides frequently disregarded international

law, notably the obligation to protect civilians and their property — almost all the 540,000 registered refugees in the country were in need of assistance and over half were internally displaced, facing trauma yet again. UNRWA had lost 14 staff members in the Syrian Arab Republic and 24 were presumed detained or missing. Regardless, UNRWA had continued to provide vital assistance to refugees in need. However, access remained irregular, and hungry refugees were trapped in grave humanitarian conditions in Damascus neighbourhoods like Yarmouk and in other areas of the Republic. UNRWA had largely maintained core health and education services by moving with refugees to areas of relative safety and opening temporary health-points or schools. Its 4,000 local staff often showed incredible courage in keeping services running.

12. Exacerbating the precarious situation of Palestine refugee communities in the Syrian Arab Republic and in neighbouring Lebanon and Jordan, less than half of UNRWA's regional crisis-response needs of \$417 million had been met that year; and it soon would be forced to give up its focus on human development and give priority to life-saving activities only.

13. In Lebanon, with its history of complex relationships between ethnic and religious communities, the approximately 400,000 registered Palestine refugees often lived in very difficult circumstances in overcrowded camps. Among the five areas of UNRWA operations, Lebanon had the highest percentage of Palestine refugees living in abject poverty. To make matters worse, approximately 44,000 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic — all of whom UNRWA was assisting with health, food and educational services — had fled to Lebanon. While UNRWA recognized the enormous burden placed on Lebanon by the massive influx of refugees from its neighbouring country and the need to strengthen the resilience of local host communities, it believed nonetheless that those refugees should be admitted, and at the same time helped to find work so that they could contribute productively to Lebanese society. It should be emphasized, lastly, that the failure to provide UNRWA with the almost \$150 million still needed to complete the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared camp, destroyed in 2007, could lead to further unrest in an already fragile area.

14. Jordan, which had been stable in comparison to its neighbours, hosted some two million Palestine refugees, the largest number in any single country.

While many in that community had been able to secure a living, others faced economic and social hardship. UNRWA's role remained important to the human development of refugees in general and the most vulnerable refugees in particular. Jordan was also hosting over 14,000 UNRWA-assisted Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic; they should be allowed to remain until the conflict subsided and conditions improved.

15. Despite the considerable challenge of dealing with so many emergencies, UNRWA had not hesitated to undertake complex internal reforms. Currently, UNRWA was a more efficient and effective Agency than it had been ten years earlier. It had improved its dialogue and transparency with partners and stakeholders, notably by engaging more with its expanding Advisory Commission, through which hosts and traditional donors assisted and advised him; it had followed a resource mobilization strategy designed to sustain and strengthen ties with traditional donors while broadening their range; and had also enhanced public advocacy outreach.

16. He was pleased to report progress in reforming the Agency's education and health programmes. Reform components that had proven successful, such as a family health team approach in its health-care clinics or the expansion of human rights education in the schools, would be deployed system-wide in 2015. Reforms under UNRWA's relief and social programmes included a greater focus on development, economic empowerment and sustainable livelihood activities and, in partnership with other organizations, a concentration on children and young people in an attempt to end the transmission of poverty across generations.

17. He thanked Governments for their continuous support of UNRWA, which relied on voluntary contributions from Member States and the European Union for 97 per cent of its funding. Its top five donors still contributed half of the total core budget. Given the growing support of Arab countries for emergencies and projects, he encouraged them to try to reach their commitment to the Agency's core funding as well. Over the decades, Palestine refugees had formed a reservoir of skilled men and women in the leading professions in the Occupied Territory and beyond. With the vital help of Governments, UNRWA was responsible for one of the most successful development processes ever.

18. As in previous years, UNRWA, which had no financial reserves of its own, was facing a one-month shortfall in its General Fund, which was used to finance the Agency's core activities. Noting the potentially dire consequences of a failure to remedy that shortfall, he urged all Member States to find ways to fund the Agency's core work before year's end. Although UNRWA had made dramatic efforts to control its expenditure, the refugee population was growing and its needs were not static, and he therefore encouraged new partners to come forward at the forthcoming UNRWA Pledging Conference.

19. He paid tribute to the work of UNRWA's 30,000 brave and expert staff members, for the most part themselves refugees, and mourned all those who had lost their lives in the conflicts in Gaza and the Syrian Arab Republic. The international community also needed to consider that, for Palestine refugees, UNRWA was not a mere purveyor of services: it was an institutional pillar which, with all its strengths and shortcomings, embodied them as a collective while remaining their source of support and sustenance until a just and lasting solution was found to their plight.

20. Sixty-five years after the creation of UNRWA, a powerful sense of the sheer unsustainability of the Palestine refugees' situation had emerged. Where it could have a direct influence, such as on the continued occupation of the Palestinian Territory, the international community was obligated to take action in keeping with international law. Neglecting the plight of Palestine refugees was a risk the world could not take because the Agency's programmes brought a much-needed measure of stability to a profoundly insecure region.

21. As the United Nations moved towards the adoption of ambitious post-2015 sustainable development goals with an accent on eliminating poverty and reducing inequality, it was essential not to exclude any pockets of humanity. UNRWA's new medium term strategy for 2016-2021 would focus on those goals, but reaching them would require all actors' sustained cooperation with UNRWA. He welcomed the fact that, in the Occupied Territory, a critical but more transparent dialogue was emerging between UNRWA and Israel, aimed at finding practical solutions to the many problems existing on the ground.

22. International solidarity in support of Palestine refugees and the Agency was vital. By sustaining

UNRWA in its mission and by providing the diplomatic and financial support needed in a landscape that was complex, challenging, and, in places, highly dangerous, the international community could ensure that the Palestine refugees' vulnerability was addressed and their rights were protected.

Interactive dialogue

23. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine), commending the Commissioner-General for his principled statements that had given voice to the Palestine refugees at a time when they had felt increasingly abandoned because of the repeated failure of the international community to protect them in the midst of conflicts, and reaffirming the gratitude of her people and Government to UNRWA's valiant staff, asked the Commissioner-General to provide more details on conditions in the remaining shelters in UNRWA schools, on provisions necessary to support the long-term internally displaced and on the funding required by the Agency.

24. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) asked what specific requests the Commissioner-General wished to convey to Member-States in terms of financial or political support, affirming that the Agency should not be left alone to cope with extreme challenges.

25. **Mr. Krähenbühl** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) said that conditions in the shelters had been chaotic during the war. UNRWA had succeeded in providing food and basic hygiene to refugees, but school buildings were not equipped to house large-scale displaced communities in the long term: water supplies and showers were critically lacking. UNRWA was still sheltering 30,000 people in 18 of its schools, down from the 300,000 initially sheltered, weeks after the end of hostilities. By comparison, the maximum number of people it had sheltered in the 2008-2009 conflict was 50,000. Currently, the Agency was focused on emergency humanitarian assistance and on recovery work. It distributed cash to those whose homes had not been as heavily damaged during the conflict, which had left 110,000 to 120,000 others homeless and an estimated 20,000 housing units completely destroyed. It would not take long, however, for the population to move from shock to despair and anger against the actors of goodwill and the Government of National Consensus.

26. UNRWA always asked for strong diplomatic support for its work. It needed lobbying that conveyed its historical mandate, the reasons it still existed and the importance of financial support. UNRWA's biggest challenge was obtaining money for its core budget, given that emergencies tended to attract the most attention from donors. He strongly appealed to Member States to contribute to it and pledged to continue working on efficiency measures.

27. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) asked what purpose UNRWA's efforts served if, a few months later, the occupying Power attacked by air and destroyed everything the Agency had rebuilt.

28. **Mr. Abdul Razak** (Malaysia) said that, while his delegation welcomed the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, it was only a temporary remedy. A complete and immediate lifting of the illegal and inhumane blockade was imperative. He wished to know if the Mechanism had facilitated the Agency's efforts to provide services and begin reconstruction of the thousands of refugee homes damaged or destroyed in the recent Israeli attack on Gaza as well as those that remained unrepaired following past attacks, and what obstacles the Agency continued to face in that regard.

29. **Mr. Gidor** (Israel) said that, during the 50-day war with Hamas, he had been in contact with UNRWA staff at all times, helping to address the Agency's logistical, consular, administrative and operational needs. Both sides had acknowledged the unprecedented level of cooperation. His aim had been to discuss how to alleviate the Palestine refugees' difficulties as a result of Hamas-triggered violence and identify a way forward better for all. He was surprised that the Commissioner-General had devoted almost the whole of his speech to the war in Gaza the previous summer and less than five minutes to the three-and-a-half-year Syrian conflict, omitting casualty figures among refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic, on which he would like further information. He asked who the Commissioner-General condemned for the suffering of Palestine refugees in that country and who was detaining the 14 UNRWA staff members who had disappeared there. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had called the Syrian conflict the great tragedy of the century. The proportion of the Commissioner-General's speech devoted to it validated the critics of UNRWA who said it was becoming a political advocacy organ for the Palestinian Authority. He asked the Commissioner-

General to respond to that. Furthermore, Israel had opened internal investigations into the seven incidents where United Nations installations had been damaged; yet the Commissioner-General had hastened to condemn Israel for violation of international law before those investigations had been concluded.

30. **Mr. Anwar** (Pakistan) said that the welcome construction of 30 new school buildings in Gaza, to alleviate the long-time shortage of classrooms and overcrowding of schools, had been seriously undermined by the number of schools that had been damaged in the recent conflict or continued to be used as shelters for long-term internally displaced Palestinian families. He asked the Commissioner-General how UNRWA was dealing with that situation, and how children whose schools had been damaged or who had been displaced were able to receive an education.

31. **Mr. Krähenbühl** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) said that UNRWA had a unique mandate to perform both humanitarian and development work. It focused on reconstruction to guarantee Palestinians their rights and dignity and on building human capital to break the cycle of providing the same humanitarian assistance year after year.

32. While the Agency aimed to work with all stakeholders to improve the situation in Gaza, the environment in which it worked was inevitably politicized and defined by the behaviour of Member States and non-State parties on the ground; the Agency was therefore obliged at times to point to the humanitarian consequences of that behaviour. For example, earlier that year, during his first visit to Gaza, the Commissioner-General had been shocked to note a ten-fold increase since the year 2000 in the number of people on UNRWA food distribution lists, which was a direct result of the blockade of Gaza. While Member States had a political role to play, the role of the Agency was to resolutely continue reconstruction in Gaza, in spite of the challenges.

33. Some building materials had indeed now arrived in Gaza thanks to the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, but cooperation between all parties was needed to ensure the regular delivery of much greater quantities of reconstruction materials, which were crucial not only for reconstruction itself but also to create jobs for Gaza's majority population of under-25-year-olds, many of whom had been educated in gender-balanced

UNRWA schools but struggled to find employment. Improved access to building materials, in addition to lifting of the blockade, would help to generate employment, promote stability and reduce aid dependency in Gaza.

34. He noted with satisfaction that daily operational coordination between UNRWA and representatives of Israel seemed to have improved significantly since the 2008-2009 conflict, with many recent problems having been resolved through open discussion.

35. While he acknowledged that in his statement he had spoken longer on Gaza than on the Syrian Arab Republic, he emphasized that speaking time was in no way indicative of commitment. UNRWA was equally dedicated to addressing the situations in both countries. However, he accepted the comment made by the Israeli representative regarding the figures for casualties among the Palestine refugees during the Syrian conflict, and offered to update them. Yet regardless of statistics, a lawless situation in one country could not absolve any other country of its responsibilities under international law. He had already denounced violations of international law by both Government forces and opposition groups in the Syrian conflict, as in the Yarmouk camp, and would be more than willing to discuss them in detail.

36. With regard to the investigations into the recent attacks on seven United Nations schools in Gaza, the Agency had carried out its responsibility by examining each of the incidents and sharing its findings. For its part, Israel was obliged under international law to carry out its investigations, with which the Agency would happily cooperate. He emphasized that he had never shown reluctance to engage in discussions with the representative of Israel, even to receive criticism, and expressed the hope that their good working relationship would continue. After all, the two of them had the same priorities: to find practical solutions on a daily basis and to take account of international law in the broader context. He looked forward to seeing the findings of Israel's investigation, about which he had no prejudgements.

37. He expressed deep concern at the social segregation caused by the blockade and exacerbated by the recent conflict in Gaza. While the Palestinians of a generation ago had always interacted with Israelis in person in business environments, many young Palestinians and Israelis growing up at the moment had

little or no personal contact with one another, leaving both sides without the mutual comprehension necessary for peaceful coexistence. Although opinions might differ, dialogue between all parties was crucial.

38. With regard to the availability of educational facilities, the Agency had worked tirelessly, in cooperation with the United Nations Mine Action Service, to prepare 100 school buildings to enable 240,000 children to return to school at the start of the academic year. With 18 schools still serving as shelters for displaced persons, resources were tight and many schools were operating on a two- or three-shift basis. Nonetheless, it had been necessary first and foremost to transform schools back from battlegrounds into places of hope and learning. The Agency was urgently seeking solutions to enable more schools to be reopened as soon as possible, but the reconstruction work depended on financial contributions.

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

39. **Ms. Syed** (Norway), introducing the report of the Working Group (A/69/391), said that the Agency was still in the midst of a financial crisis: it needed to provide emergency assistance in the aftermath of the unprecedented destruction caused during the conflict in Gaza in July and August of 2014; to continue to provide vital support for hundreds of thousands of Palestine refugees remaining in the Syrian Arab Republic; and to assist those in Lebanon with health, food and educational services, all the while facing an acute funding shortage in all five fields of operation. A large funding gap was anticipated for the General Fund, currently with a shortfall of \$58 million, for the Gaza Reconstruction and Emergency Appeal and for the Syrian Regional Crisis Plan, and greater efforts were needed to close those gaps and thus enable UNRWA to respond effectively to refugee needs and to cover staff costs, which represented approximately 80 per cent of the Agency's General Fund expenditure. Without immediate action, thousands of committed staff members would not receive their salary in December.

40. The Agency had renewed its appeal to donors to make additional efforts to fully fund the core budget and emergency appeals, in particular for its activities in the Syrian Arab Republic and Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of Palestine refugees were facing extreme challenges. UNRWA now had virtually no working

capital and, notwithstanding the increasing demand on the world's humanitarian resources, needed an injection of \$165 million. The Working Group called for the prompt and complete fulfilment of outstanding donor pledges to UNRWA, coupled, where possible, with multi-year funding commitments. It welcomed UNRWA's continued efforts to widen its donor base to reach non-traditional sources of funding and to develop its partnership unit.

41. Heightened political instability in its five fields of operations was adding to the Agency's operational challenges. Concerned by tight restrictions on the movement of UNRWA staff and humanitarian goods in and out of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Working Group called upon the Israeli Government to accord the Agency free and unfettered access, and to open crossings into Gaza to allow for the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons, consistent with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The widespread devastation resulting from the 51-day Israeli military operation in July and August 2014 would have serious implications for the future work of UNRWA in Gaza, and the Agency would need enhanced donor support. Its March 2014 emergency appeal for \$300 million, of which 85 per cent would cover activities in Gaza and 15 per cent would cover activities in the West Bank, had yielded pledges totalling only 37 per cent of the target as at August 2014. Consequently, significant cuts had been necessary in Gaza and the West Bank, including the suspension of the school feeding programme; and food assistance for the remainder of the 2014 programme would not likely be sustained.

42. The ongoing blockade of Gaza had incurred extra staffing, transit and logistical costs of more than \$6.7 million in 2013. The Working Group reiterated its concern about the lack of progress in lifting the remaining restrictions, and urged Israel to expedite efforts to that end. The Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism negotiated to facilitate the entry of more dual-use building materials was vital for successful reconstruction.

43. In the West Bank, access difficulties also hindered UNRWA's efforts, settler violence had increased by 13 per cent since the previous report and the number of forcible displacements as a result of house demolitions remained high, with the Bedouin community being disproportionately affected. The Working Group was pleased to note that the Palestinian

Authority's exemption from value-added tax had led to a 60-per-cent decrease in VAT paid in the West Bank and Gaza over the course of one year.

44. The attention of the Working Group had also been drawn to the disastrous consequences of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, where 270,000 Palestine refugees had been displaced within the country, and 54,000 refugee homes had been destroyed or damaged. With pledges as at October 2014 amounting to a mere 47 per cent of the total requested under the Syrian Regional Crisis Plan, the funding shortfall had serious consequences, particularly in terms of unsatisfied humanitarian needs. The Working Group called on all neighbouring countries to allow Palestine refugees fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic to cross their borders. Furthermore, it called upon all parties to the conflict to preserve the neutrality of the camps and the security of the Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic.

45. The often-forgotten task of rebuilding the Nahr el-Bared camp and assisting displaced refugees remained immense: the Agency required \$6 million for 2014 to support those still unable to return to their homes and a further \$157 million to complete the reconstruction of the camp. The Working Group expressed concern at the lack of financial resources to address new challenges faced by UNRWA in Lebanon due to the influx of some 40,000 Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic.

46. The international community must ensure that the Agency's services were maintained at an acceptable level, quantitatively and qualitatively, in line with its mandate, and that funding kept pace with the changing needs and growth of the refugee population. The Working Group therefore urged Governments that had not yet done so to contribute to UNRWA on a regular basis, and called on Governments that had reduced or ceased to make contributions to step up their support. The Working Group also urged Governments to fully fund the Agency's General Fund for the biennium 2014-2015 and, where possible, to put in place increased multi-year funding to allow UNRWA to improve planning of its activities. There was also a need to identify potential sources of funding to meet severance payment obligations as necessary. The continued commitment of the international community to the refugees remained essential in the absence of a just and lasting solution to their problem.

General debate

47. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the crisis in July and August had highlighted the extreme vulnerability of the more than five million Palestine refugees, who had endured injustice for over six decades. She affirmed the right of the Palestine refugees to return to their homes and to receive compensation, in accordance with international law and General Assembly resolution 194 (III); and the right of Palestinians displaced in the June 1967 hostilities to return to their homes and lands in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions. In that regard, her delegation denounced Israeli rhetoric denying the rights of Palestine refugees and any responsibility for their plight, when it had deliberately engaged in expulsion and ethnic cleansing; Israel's non-compliance with the Charter of the United Nations and its other obligations under international law had perpetuated the refugee question. In the absence of a just solution to the issue, renewed international commitment was required for a lasting solution not only to the Israel-Palestine conflict, but also to the wider regional dimension it had lately acquired.

48. Her delegation recognized the incalculable contribution of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic in hosting refugees over the decades and the invaluable support of the donor community. The contributions of traditional and new donors alike, and the recently increased support from Arab States, had sustained UNRWA's mission, enabling it to provide vital assistance to Palestine refugees and alleviating chronic Agency shortfalls. Contributions to the Agency's core budget, responses to emergency appeals, pledges of support at the recent Cairo Conference and in-kind assistance, including contributions of food, shelter, medical supplies and fuel, were all meaningful and essential. She urged Member States to support UNRWA fully, as the Agency truly made a difference in the lives of refugees in a vast number of areas: the value of hope in the context of human perseverance could not be quantified.

49. As for specific situations in the Agency's fields of operation, Palestine refugees continued to suffer under the illegal blockade that had destroyed the economy and the very fabric of society. Startling figures on the force of its impact had been recorded even before the violent military onslaught against Gaza, the extent of which had been conveyed in many United Nations

reports and described by the Secretary-General as a source of shame to the international community. The magnitude of the death and destruction had impelled her Government to declare Gaza a humanitarian disaster area, and was evidence that the occupying Power had grossly breached the duty to protect civilians and must be held accountable also for other indisputable violations of international law. The Palestinian people were still reeling from the war — mourning the thousands killed, the overwhelming majority of whom were civilians and children, healing the injured and caring for the orphaned. With more than half a million people displaced at the height of the conflict and widespread destruction leaving over 100,000 homeless, some 40,000 long-term internally displaced persons were still living in UNRWA schools.

50. Her delegation strongly condemned the killing and injury that had devastated so many Palestinian families, and also the deadly attacks against UNRWA schools and the civilians sheltering in them, which underscored Israel's total disrespect for international humanitarian law and the neutrality and inviolability of United Nations premises. The UNRWA Commissioner-General had repeatedly and transparently addressed also the issue of weapons discovered during the conflict at vacant UNRWA schools, which Palestine condemned as a violation of the inviolability and security of the Agency's premises and personnel. She rejected Israel's assertions, however that its targeting of the facilities were thus justified. The enquiry ordered by the Secretary-General into both matters was welcome.

51. The Palestinian Government of National Consensus was partnering with the United Nations to address immediate humanitarian and reconstruction needs in the gruelling recovery effort in Gaza. It was hoped that the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism would expedite the entry of construction materials. However, to address the needs in Gaza; the underlying causes of the conflict, including the blockade, must be tackled.

52. In the rest of Occupied Palestine, Israel's illegal policies, which included the use of excessive force, forced displacement, settlement activity and the construction of the wall in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, the demolition of homes and arbitrary, illegal restrictions on movement that affected civilians' access to medical services and education, persisted and continued to adversely affect refugee communities and also hinder the access and movement of UNRWA

personnel, regrettably at financial loss to the Agency. Her delegation called on the occupying Power to comply with all its international legal obligations and to cease its obstruction of the Agency's work.

53. In view of the devastating impact of the Syrian conflict on the Palestine refugees there and in the neighbouring countries to which they had fled, it was imperative to maintain the neutrality of the refugee camps and to guarantee protection and unimpeded humanitarian access. Her delegation acknowledged the tireless efforts of the Agency and its partners, and the strain placed on the host countries, but called once again for open borders and non-discrimination against refugees. The spillover of refugees fleeing the Syrian crisis had exacerbated an already difficult situation in Lebanon. She urged UNRWA to continue to improve camp conditions there and, commending its efforts to reconstruct the Nahr el-Bared camp, appealed for sufficient funds for that crucial project as well as continued emergency relief for those displaced. It was also hoped that Lebanon would implement legislation to allow labour-market access for Palestine refugees to remedy their severe poverty and the Palestinian leadership reaffirmed its cooperation with the Lebanese Government. It was a relief that despite the volatility in the region, the situation of Palestine refugees in Jordan, host to the largest refugee population, had remained relatively stable.

54. Palestine reiterated its deepest gratitude to United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations working together to assist the Palestine refugees, but it echoed the Commissioner-General's statement that humanitarian aid alone could not make up for the denial of dignity and rights. While UNRWA's work in all fields of operation remained necessary, she called once again for serious efforts to resolve the Palestine refugee question, which was one of the highest priorities for the Palestinian leadership and one of the keys to peace. All core final status issues had to be resolved in accordance with the Charter, international law and all relevant United Nations resolutions in order to end the prolonged tragedy of her people as a whole.

55. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that the mandated role of UNRWA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was essential in the absence of a just and lasting solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees that would include their rights under General Assembly

resolution 194 (III). The Movement was gravely concerned by the critical situation particularly of the refugees in the Gaza Strip, who had endured immense suffering and devastation under Israel's recent onslaught. The unprecedented civilian casualties, the scale of the destruction of civilian infrastructure and the repeated targeting of UNRWA facilities were deeply alarming. The illegal and inhumane Israeli seven-year blockade of Gaza had already crippled its previously dynamic trade-oriented economy and pushed the majority of the population into poverty and aid dependency, and it was now preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid and basic materials for reconstruction, thus obstructing economic and social recovery. To enable UNRWA personnel to discharge their duties freely, the occupying Power must immediately lift all restrictions on free, sustained movement of persons and goods between Gaza and the outside world, in compliance with international law.

56. Elsewhere as well, in the West Bank, the many restrictions on movement imposed by Israel under the guise of security concerns, including in East Jerusalem, together with the forcible displacements, the destruction of homes and assets and the separation barrier, continued to have a profound effect on the living conditions of Palestine refugees. The international community must uphold its moral, political and legal responsibilities to bring an end to Israel's illegal policies and all its violations against the Palestinian people. The Movement also expressed its concern over the existing situation of the Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic, thousands of whom had fled to safety in other countries. It recognized the added demands that the situation placed on UNRWA in terms of emergency assistance, food and financial support due to loss of livelihood.

57. The chronic funding shortfalls in the UNRWA General Fund highlighted by the Commissioner-General undermined its efforts and, while the Movement valued the pledges made at the recent Cairo Conference, it encouraged all donors to give generously to help UNRWA overcome the serious core budget gap, which was exacerbated by the increased expenditures needed to cope with the deteriorating conditions and instability in all its fields of operation.

58. The current humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory called for intensified action by the entire international community to put an end to the occupation of Palestine and find a just solution for

the Palestine refugee problem based on the principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

59. **Mr. Al-Mouallimi** (Saudi Arabia), referring to the Israeli delegation's comment on the amount of time the Commissioner-General had spent on different topics, said that if the ratio of speaking time reflected the relative length of the conflicts, he should have spent 100 minutes speaking about the plight of Palestine refugees, who had suffered for over 60 years. While his delegation strongly condemned the brutal killing of both Palestinians and Syrians by the Syrian regime, he recalled that Israel was responsible for forcing the people of Palestine to flee from their homeland to the Syrian Arab Republic.

60. Speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), he offered his deepest condolences to the staff of UNRWA for the loss of their colleagues killed during Israel's brutal attack on Gaza in July and August that year.

61. The OIC valued the Agency's work and was concerned at the budget shortfall described by the Commissioner-General in his statement. It therefore called on Member States, financial institutions and other donors to increase their financial contributions to the Agency to enable it to provide services to the rising number of Palestine refugees. While financial support was necessary to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, it would not solve the root problem, which was Israel's continual destruction of everything that the Agency built, as highlighted by the Secretary-General on his recent visit to Gaza. The international community must take a bold stance and hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for its crimes.

62. He reaffirmed the full support of the OIC for the humanitarian work done by UNRWA to ease the suffering of Palestinian refugees until they could return to their lands and receive just compensation, in accordance with resolution 194 (III), for the immense hardship they had endured for decades. The tragic situation suffered by the Palestinian people would not end while Israel continued to occupy Arab territory and violate international law. The OIC therefore supported efforts to set a time limit to end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories and compel it to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders; and efforts towards the implementation of the two-State solution and the

establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

63. Speaking in his national capacity, he said that Saudi Arabia was the third-largest regular donor to UNRWA, with an annual contribution of US\$2 million. It had, moreover, made additional donations amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars to support reconstruction efforts and provide medical supplies in Gaza, including a pledge of US\$500 million made at the recent Cairo Conference. Saudi Arabia would spare no effort to support its Palestinian brothers. It too believed in attacking the root causes of their plight by ending the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories and establishing a Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

64. **Mr. Vrailas** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilisation and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that following the hostilities in Gaza and Israel, which had taken a devastating toll on Palestine refugees and civilians and once again forced the Agency to step up its humanitarian and protection assistance, the European Union had welcomed the 26 August ceasefire and the successful outcome of the Cairo Conference, at which the European Union and its member States had pledged an overall contribution of 468 million euros for the reconstruction in Gaza. However, the international community could not be expected to pick up the pieces and the bill after each new round of violence: fundamental and durable change was vital and the underlying causes of the violence must be addressed. The parties must take the political steps necessary to agree to a durable ceasefire and to end the cycle of violence. The European Union regretted that the ceasefire talks scheduled for 27 October had been cancelled because of violence in the Sinai and urged the parties to resume negotiations as soon as possible.

65. During the hostilities, the European Union had condemned the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas and other militant Palestinian groups and their calls for civilians to act as human shields. Similarly, while recognizing Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, it had underscored that it must be proportionate and in line with international humanitarian law; and it had condemned its shelling of

UNRWA schools in Gaza and the killing of innocent displaced civilians there. All parties must respect the inviolability and the integrity of United Nations premises and all alleged violations of international humanitarian law by all sides, including alleged uses of United Nations facilities for military purposes, must be investigated according to international standards to provide justice for victims or their families.

66. It was now essential for the Palestinian Authority to assume its full governmental responsibilities in the Gaza Strip and for the Israeli Government to lift its restrictions, especially with regard to movement and access. Recent understandings between the Palestinian parties and the meeting of the Palestinian consensus government, as well as the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, with its temporary monitoring provisions negotiated as a first step towards the necessary opening of all crossing points, were welcome developments and should be pursued. The situation in Gaza and the plight of Palestine refugees would be resolved only as part of the settlement of all final status issues through a comprehensive, final and negotiated peace agreement based on the two-State solution.

67. With UNRWA facing another terrible crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, which was exacting a heavy toll on Palestine refugees and UNRWA staff there, the European Union called on all parties to the Syrian conflict, and especially on the Assad regime, to implement all the provisions of relevant Security Council resolutions and statements, in particular by taking appropriate steps to protect civilians, desisting from attacks directed against civilian targets, and facilitating safe, comprehensive and unhindered access to all those in need of humanitarian assistance. Aware of the burden created by the influx of displaced refugees to neighbouring countries, the European Union reaffirmed its commitment to continue to provide assistance to support both refugees and host communities in countries affected by the crisis. However, in the light of alarming reports of Palestinian refugees being turned back, it stressed the importance of the principle of non-refoulement.

68. In 2013 the European Union, the largest provider of assistance to the Palestine refugees, had also contributed over half of all donor support to the UNRWA General Fund and about 43 per cent of all contributions to the Agency's overall operations and had set out a multi-year commitment which would provide much needed predictability to UNRWA. The

European Union was increasingly concerned, however, by the clearly unsustainable financial situation that must be addressed; UNRWA itself must also take strategic action beyond immediate remedial measures. The European Union called once again on other donors, including first-time contributors, to share the burden, and recalled the important engagement by members of the League of Arab States concerning the 7.8-per-cent target for their contributions to the core budget. The Agency's medium-term strategy for 2016-2021 together with the equally essential strategic response plans to translate it into action would be an important tool in addressing the challenges at hand, including the increasing demand for its services, the dire financial situation and the need to streamline service delivery. Global strategic alliances and partnerships led by UNRWA were becoming increasingly necessary to ease demands on the core budget and to ensure that the Agency remained in a position to plan and deliver its core services within the framework of a manageable budget and adequate financing.

69. **Ms. Sughayar** (Jordan) said that rising numbers of refugees and displaced persons were due to increasing levels of violence and armed conflict worldwide. In the Middle East in particular, many refugees were suffering the effects of occupation and forced displacement. The international community must respond collectively to the resulting humanitarian crises and not leave host countries such as Jordan to carry the burden alone.

70. Her delegation urged donor countries to fulfil their pledges and increase their financial contributions to UNRWA which, as the main source of support for 5 million Palestine refugees, was facing rising demand for its services. Jordan acknowledged the role of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA and hoped that the Agency would succeed in implementing its reform process and its medium-term strategy for 2016-2021.

71. Among the best ways to improve living conditions for Palestine refugees was to give them loans to enable them to establish small businesses that could provide them with a sustainable income, thus reducing their dependency on direct aid.

72. Jordan was presently hosting 42 per cent of all Palestine refugees, more than any other country. Its Government worked in partnership with UNRWA to

assist refugees through a network of schools, clinics and social centres. However, UNRWA funding for refugee camps in Jordan was lower than that allocated to other countries, leaving her Government to carry a heavy financial burden. It therefore asked that more financial resources be allocated to UNRWA operations in Jordan. In addition, Jordan had received over 600,000 refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, further stretching its limited resources. The international community must share in the responsibility to provide assistance and find a strategic long-term solution to the current situation, which had evolved from an emergency into a full-blown humanitarian crisis.

73. Her Government was highly committed to addressing humanitarian issues, in particular the situation of Palestine refugees, and insisted that Palestinians must be guaranteed the right to return and the right to compensation. Her Government would of course continue to provide protection and assistance to Palestine refugees until their situation could be justly resolved through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, and it called for direct negotiations on the matter to be resumed.

74. The deteriorating living conditions of Palestinians, particularly in the Gaza Strip, as a result of Israel's continuing occupation and violations of international law were a source of concern. Her delegation called on the Israeli authorities to implement United Nations resolutions relating to Palestine refugees and lift all restrictions imposed on Palestinians.

75. For too long, Palestinians had been displaced, forced to live on a bare minimum, and denied their legitimate right to establish their own sovereign nation. The international community must do everything in its power to enable Palestinians to live in dignity in an independent State based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

76. **Mr. Alday González** (Mexico), hailing UNRWA's important and heroic work, especially during the recent armed conflict, said that Israel's deadly attacks against UNRWA schools and refugee camps in Gaza constituted serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law that should be punished. The immunity and safety of United Nations agencies and personnel in the field must be respected at all times. Concerned over the dire

situation of Palestine refugees after the recent escalation in violence, particularly in Gaza, and aware of the humanitarian emergency, Mexico had fulfilled its pledge to contribute an extra \$1.1 million towards UNRWA's reconstruction effort in Gaza in addition to its regular contributions. However, reconstruction alone was not enough: the root causes of the conflict must be addressed to avoid a recurrence of the deadly hostilities of July and August that had rained death and destruction on the Palestinians and terrorized the population of southern Israel. Mexico called for an end to the intolerable, counterproductive blockade of the Gaza Strip and urged all parties to comply with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

77. There was also an urgent need to address underlying regional problems. The Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority must therefore resume direct peace talks as soon as possible, to guarantee the right of both to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders, in line with Security Council resolutions, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. All parties, avoiding unilateral measures that undermined trust and diminished chances of achieving a lasting negotiated solution, should show the necessary flexibility and political will to end the conflict.

78. **Mr. Kumar** (India) said that his country, inspired by its own freedom struggle and also guided by its philosophical tradition, would continue its full support for Palestine's bid to become a full Member of the United Nations. In addition to strong political support at all levels for the Palestinian cause, India had consistently been extending technical and financial assistance to Palestine for humanitarian relief, development projects, the establishment of schools, budgetary support and the training of Palestinian officials. In addition, India contributed US\$1 million annually to UNRWA and had recently pledged US\$4 million for the reconstruction of Gaza. Furthermore, a number of development projects were being implemented in Palestine through the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum.

79. Given the current precarious and unpredictable situation and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, the role of UNRWA in providing critical assistance to Palestine refugees, under extremely difficult conditions, had assumed even greater significance. His Government commended the Agency for successfully and diligently executing its mandate in its five fields of

operation and acknowledged the invaluable cooperation of host countries. India supported a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel.

80. **Mr. Abdul Razak** (Malaysia) said that following the cessation of the recent hostilities in the Gaza Strip, the international community had stood in solidarity with Palestinians as they attempted to recover from the ravages of war. Malaysia had not been alone in condemning the shocking and senseless shelling of UNRWA schools in Gaza that had killed many innocent children; at the same time, it had been disturbed by allegations that the schools had been used to store weapons. It remained concerned about the more vulnerable Gazans who had no alternative places to seek shelter.

81. Despite the heartening expressions of support for UNRWA that had followed the ceasefire and the pledges made during the Cairo Conference, the Israeli blockade continued to stifle the economy of the Gaza Strip and prevented the much-needed entry of construction materials. Malaysia called once again for an end to the blockade and for the lifting of restrictions on the movement of UNRWA personnel and goods in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, for they continued to undermine the Agency's execution of its mandate. The international community must exhort all those responsible to act urgently to remove the restrictions in accordance with international law and agreements between UNRWA, the State of Palestine and Israel. His Government was closely observing the functioning of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism and hoped that it would advance permanent and emergency repairs and large-scale reconstruction projects.

82. The humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic was of grave concern, particularly in the case of the hundreds of thousands of Palestine refugees under the Agency's care. The important work of UNRWA in that country deserved the full support of the international community.

83. The chronic shortfall in the Agency's core budget must be addressed. Malaysia, as a non-traditional donor, remained firmly committed to assisting the Palestine refugees through its regular and one-time contributions to UNRWA. In the wake of the latest

hostilities, his Government had pledged RM 330,000 to the latest UNRWA flash appeal for Gaza. Support for the Palestinian cause and for the Agency was also strong in his country's private sector and civil society, as evidenced by the recent donation of RM 1 million by CIMB Islamic Bank to the Malaysian Medical Relief Society for its medical collaboration with UNRWA. All Member States must increase and sustain their contributions to the Agency's work. It was a shared responsibility of the international community to provide the vital support that UNRWA needed to fulfil its crucial mandate effectively in the face of many challenges.

84. **Mr. Sasanakul** (Thailand), recognizing the courageous and crucial work carried out by UNRWA personnel, expressed condolences to the families of those who had lost their lives during the course of their duties. He called on all parties to ensure the safety and security of UNRWA personnel and facilities, in accordance with international law.

85. Thailand, which had a long tradition of providing humanitarian assistance to those in need, had recently increased its annual UNRWA contribution to US\$40,000, in addition to offering academic and vocational training programmes tailored specifically to Palestinians. Member States should be encouraged to provide sustained, predictable and adequate support to the Agency to enable it to continue its noble work.

86. In response to the widespread devastation resulting from the recent deadly escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip, requiring billions for reconstruction, his Government had contributed US\$100,000 to the Agency's flash appeal for Gaza and pledged an additional US\$100,000 to the Palestine Red Crescent Society. Thailand urged all parties to observe strictly the ceasefire brokered by Egypt and to resume peace talks with a view to enabling the State of Palestine and the State of Israel to live together side by side in peace and security, in accordance with the principle of the two-State solution.

87. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Iceland) said that the assistance provided by UNRWA was more important than ever owing to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, which had forced 50 per cent of the Palestine refugees in that country into internal displacement, with only a few thousand managing, with difficulty, to flee across borders. Commending the dedication and bravery of UNRWA personnel working under those

extreme circumstances, Iceland called on all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, especially the Syrian Government, to fully implement Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014), and to do everything in their power to protect civilians and ensure unhindered access to humanitarian assistance, in accordance with international law. With particular reference to the situation in Yarmouk, he emphasized that depriving civilians of food, medicine or other necessities as a weapon of war was a grave violation of international humanitarian law.

88. In the wake of the destruction visited on Gaza by the Israel Defense Forces in response to the pointless and indiscriminate rocket attacks by elements in Gaza, reconstruction and the clearing of unexploded ordnance was the immediate priority for UNRWA. Israel must speed up access to reconstruction materials beyond the pace allowed by the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, and receive exports from Gaza so as to revive the Palestinian economy. There was no other way to decrease the dependency of Palestine refugees in Gaza on humanitarian assistance and thus reduce the need for UNRWA funding.

89. Among the other ills of occupation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli forces were invading Palestine refugee camps with increasing frequency and the Israeli authorities were obstructing UNRWA operations by curtailing the freedom of movement of UNRWA personnel, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations, the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, the Comay-Michelmore Agreement and relevant United Nations resolutions.

90. The situation in the occupied State of Palestine and the situation of Palestine refugees were directly related and by all official accounts completely unsustainable. Member States must therefore ensure that the Security Council and the General Assembly took the necessary actions to facilitate the two-State solution, including a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Until that solution could be reached, the international community must do its utmost to support the vital work of UNRWA, which was a significant force for stability in the region.

The meeting rose at 6.11 p.m.