



# UNRWA

## PRESS RELEASE

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Ad Hoc Committee for Voluntary  
Contributions to UNRWA  
AM Meeting

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### EIGHTEEN DONORS PLEDGE NEARLY \$90 MILLION FOR UN PALESTINE REFUGEE AGENCY

Eighteen donor countries pledged approximately \$90 million for the 2005 budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), during this morning's meeting of the General Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee for Voluntary Contributions.

Opening the meeting, Peter Tesch (Australia), speaking on behalf of General Assembly President Jean Ping, said it was tragic that UNRWA was still desperately needed some 55 years after the international community had attempted to find a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian situation. The Palestinian refugee population had swelled 500 per cent to some 400,000 since UNRWA's inception. The Agency, however, remained considerably cash-strapped, and its staff worked under extremely difficult circumstances, with 12 losing their lives to violence in the occupied territories in the last four years.

Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, said that, while the amount pledged during the meeting was a far cry from the agency's more than \$300 million budget, the conference was the best ever in relative terms. He expressed hope that major donor countries not present at the meeting would come forward with pledges at a later date. The UNRWA, he stressed, could not maintain the quality of education, welfare and development assistance given to Palestinian refugees without more contributions. The Agency's \$339 million budget for 2005 was nominally 2.7 per cent higher over the previous year, yet lower in real terms, with 66 per cent allocated for education programmes, 22 per cent for health care and the remaining 12 per cent for relief and social services.

Consistent international support had allowed UNRWA to deliver assistance to refugees, but that task had become more difficult with time. In recent years, resources made available to the Agency had not kept pace with the increasing demand for services among a growing refugee population, in which poverty and unemployment rates had reached 70 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively. Successive funding shortfalls over time had taken a toll on UNRWA's service and infrastructure and operational capacity, with expenditure on services and staff suffering from chronic restrictions. Continuing assistance from the international community would be vital to rehabilitate refugee communities hard hit by years of crisis, he said.

The representatives of the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, China, Thailand, Luxembourg, Norway, Tunisia, Republic of Korea, Netherlands, India, Spain, France, Malaysia and Belgium made pledges during the meeting.

The Observer for the Holy See also made a pledge.

In addition, the representatives of Japan, Turkey and Iceland said they would make pledges at a later date.

Closing the meeting, the Observer for Palestine thanked Member States for their contributions. The funds would help ensure continued food, health and social services, as well as microfinance and enterprise programmes for more than 4 million Palestinian refugees, or half the Palestinian population, who were grappling with rising poverty, overcrowding and unemployment. Israel's direct action against UNRWA staff had also seriously hampered UNRWA's work and caused financial losses. By making good on their pledges in a timely manner, donors would contribute to easing the refugees' dire circumstances. She expressed hope that the outcome of the Geneva conference earlier this year would generate greater financial support for UNRWA, stressing that such funding, in line with General Assembly resolution 194, was critical for the refugees' welfare as a whole.

## Statements

PETER TESCH (Australia), speaking on behalf of General Assembly President Jean Ping, said UNRWA had initially been set up to relieve starvation and distress among Palestinian refugees who had fled their homes in 1948. Since then it had become the Organization's largest agency, providing education, health and microfinance needs to Palestinian refugees in the region. It was tragic that the Agency was still desperately needed some 55 years after the international community had attempted to find a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian situation.

Given that the refugee population in the region had increased by 500 per cent to some 400,000 since UNRWA had started, he said the Agency had remained under considerable financial constraint in delivering its services. Moreover, UNRWA had carried out its work under extremely difficult circumstances, losing 12 of its staff to violence in the occupied territories since 2000.

PETER HANSEN, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, said the socio-economic situation in the occupied territories had remained grim for the fifth consecutive year. Some 50 months of closures, curfews and military operations had produced an intense economic recession, with poverty and unemployment rates rising to 70 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively. Continuing assistance from the international community would be vital in rehabilitating refugee communities hard hit by years of crisis.

The UNRWA's emergency appeal for 2005 came to \$186 million, including \$41 million for emergency employment, \$54 million for food, and \$68 million for shelter reconstruction. While consistent international support had allowed UNRWA to deliver assistance to refugees, the task had become more difficult with time. In recent years, resources made available to the Agency had not kept pace with the increasing needs of a growing refugee population. Its income in 2004 had exceeded that of 2003, but exchange rate fluctuations had accounted for most of the increase. Moreover, UNRWA was still struggling to cope with the rising demand for services and inadequate resources. Successive funding shortfalls over time had taken a toll on the Agency's service and infrastructure and operational capacity, with expenditure on services and staff suffering from chronic restrictions.

The agency's cash budget for 2005 was \$339 million, he said, which was 2.7 per cent higher than 2004. While nominally some 2.7 per cent higher than 2004, it had declined in real terms when inflation and the growth in services were taken into account. Of resources allocated to core programmes in 2005, education accounted for 66 per cent (\$195 million), health 22 per cent (\$65 million), and relief and social services 12 per cent (\$35 million). The Agency had managed to balance its budget less due to increased income than to decreased levels of service.

## Pledges

Country	Amount Pledged	Local Currency
Japan	To be announced	
United Arab Emirates	\$500,000	
Kuwait	\$1,500,000	
Denmark	\$11,000,000	60,000,000 Danish kroner
Sweden	\$30,000,000	
Austria	\$1,000,000	
China	\$80,000	
Thailand	\$30,000	
Luxembourg	\$2,100,000	1,700,000 euros
Norway	(approximately \$16,400,000	100,000,000 Norwegian kroner
Tunisia		2,000 Tunisian dinars
Republic of Korea	\$100,000	
Holy See	\$20,000	
Netherlands	\$16,000,000	11,798,000 euros
India	\$20,000	
Spain		At least 3,000,000 euros, possibly more
Turkey	To be announced	
France	\$6,500,000	5,000,000 euros

Iceland	To be announced	
Malaysia	\$25,000	
Belgium	\$1,060,000	800,000 euros

## Concluding Remarks

The Observer for Palestine thanked donors for their contributions to UNRWA, noting that the Agency supported more than 4 million Palestinian refugees. The money would help ensure continued food, health and social services, as well as microfinance and enterprise programmes. It would foster self-sufficiency and development among refugees. Rising poverty, overcrowding, unemployment and the grave humanitarian situation made such contributions essential to refugees living in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories had continued to negatively affect Palestinian refugees, half the Palestinian population. Many refugees, including many children, had suffered death, injury and the loss of their homes due to Israel's occupation, creating a greater need for emergency housing, medical and food assistance. The occupiers' direct action against UNRWA staff had seriously hampered the Agency's work and had led to financial losses.

She expressed hope that the situation would immediately end and that international law would be respected. The timely and integral fulfilment of donations would ease the refugees' dire circumstances. She expressed hope that the outcome of the Geneva conference earlier this year would generate greater support for UNRWA. She thanked Mr. Hansen and his staff for their tireless efforts and dedicated service under difficult and often life-threatening circumstances, and the host countries for their support and assistance. The international community's financial support for UNRWA, in line with General Assembly resolution 194, was critical for the refugees as a whole.

In concluding remarks, Mr. HANSEN said that, in relative terms, this was the best pledging conference ever. While the total amount fell far short of the \$300 million UNRWA was aiming for, several large donors had not attended the conference. He expressed hope that such countries would make pledges at a later date. The UNRWA was hoping that donor contributions would be sufficient to maintain the quality of education, welfare and development assistance provided for Palestinian refugees. The Agency could not do so without more contributions.

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