



UNRWA

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Working Towards a Better Future for Palestine Refugees

Amman – UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, is holding a two-day meeting with 26 major donor countries and host authorities to plan the future of humanitarian assistance to the millions of stateless Palestinians scattered across the Middle East.

The directors of UNRWA's main programmes – providing education, health, relief and social services, micro-credit and camp development to the refugees – presented to donors their plans for upgrading UNRWA's services over the next three to five years. This initiative, known as UNRWA's Medium Term Plan, will require a substantial increase in resources and so the Agency is working in partnership with donors and host governments to ensure that the contents of the plan have a realistic chance of being funded.

The meeting also discussed the priorities for humanitarian action that emerged from UNRWA's high level meeting in Geneva in June this year. Donors raised such issues as ensuring the applicability of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory and ensuring that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is applied throughout UNRWA's operations.

UNRWA's directors from the West Bank and Gaza described to the meeting the suffering faced by the refugees living through the escalating conflict in the occupied territory and the difficulties faced by UNRWA in trying to deliver humanitarian services to them. In Gaza, UNRWA has only recently been able to deliver food to aid to 600,000 refugees that should have been distributed in June. The delay was caused by Israeli security procedures at the crossings into and out of the strip.

Many donors called in their formal statements to the meeting for the Israel to comply fully with its obligations under international humanitarian law and allow UNRWA full and unrestricted access for the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The meeting also saw many of the donor representatives pledge their support for the work of UNRWA and pay tribute to the Agency's employees and their work in the face of considerable risks in the occupied territory. The meeting was told of the death of one UNRWA staff member last Sunday. Maher Mahmoud Zakout was an UNRWA teacher killed on his way to work during the ongoing Israeli incursion into northern Gaza. In total, eleven UNRWA employees have now been killed in the course of the present conflict.

Peter Hansen, UNRWA's Commissioner-General, referred to recent allegations made against Agency staff by the Israeli authorities and told the meeting: "The false accusations have to stop. It is in the interests of both the refugees and Israel, for UNRWA and Israeli authorities to have a mutually respectful relationship."

In a briefing on the Agency's financial situation, donors were told that UNRWA faces a deficit of US\$7.3 million on its regular budget at the end of 2004 and that its US\$ 209.4 million Emergency Appeal for Gaza and the West Bank had so far received pledges of US\$89.4 million.

At the meeting the European Commission announced a pledge of €20 million for Gaza and The Netherlands announced it would donate an additional €3 million to the Emergency Appeal. Together the pledges today amount to around \$27.6 million of assistance to the Palestine refugees.

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