



UNRWA

PRESS RELEASE

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UNRWA Displays Accomplishments at Open Day

Damascus – With Palestine refugee students taking to the runway to display colourful clothing and Agency staff showcasing major achievements despite continued challenges, UNRWA opened its doors to the public today ahead of a key conference in Geneva next week on improving services and emergency assistance for millions of Palestine refugees, of whom over 413,000 are in Syria.

Senior officials from aid agencies, foreign ministries and other multilateral development bodies from 67 countries will meet in Geneva 7 – 8 June to shore up support for UNRWA's work to better assist some 4.1 million men, women and children who continue to face major hardship 56 years after many of them became refugees.

"UNRWA once spent about US\$ 200 a year per refugee, which covered education, health, relief and social services," said Angela Williams, Director of UNRWA Affairs in Syria at the Agency's annual open day here held at its vocational school, the Damascus Training Centre (DTC). "But that figure has now fallen to US\$ 70 a year per refugee, mainly because of a population increase and the lack of additional funding from the international community."

The regular annual budget in Syria is nearly US\$ 27 million. But with some 64,000 students attending UNRWA schools and around 1.2 million patient visits to the Agency's 23 health clinics in one year alone, resources are spread thin.

"We hope the Geneva conference will help address these challenges," said Williams.

UNRWA, however, has still been able to implement major projects, many of which are aimed at economic empowerment of the refugees. In Syria during the past year alone, these have included: launching a micro-enterprise and micro-finance programme in Yarmouk to benefit thousands of small business owners; inaugurating 28 housing units in Ein el Tal, a learning resource centre in Homs, an expanded health centre in Husseinieh and a Clothing Technology Course at the DTC, all funded by the United States; opening a German funded school in Husseinieh; and inaugurating a Japanese funded community centre in Qabr Essit. The Agency has also received a pledge of some US\$ 5 million from Canada for its Neirab Rehabilitation Project to improve living conditions for thousands of refugees who live in World War II army barracks.

"We have had many challenges this year, in part as a result of the continued conflict in Gaza and the West Bank, where thousands have lost their homes and livelihoods," said Williams. "But we have also had successes and we are grateful to the donor community who have continued to show their support for the refugees."

The event was attended by some two hundred guests representing the donor and business community along with governmental officials, including 'Ali Mustafa, the Director-General of the General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR), who expressed his support for the Geneva conference.

"The foremost aim of this conference is to expand the donor base and increase the donations to the Agency in order to provide the Palestine refugees with better services in terms of building schools, health and social community centres and implementation of infrastructure projects to improve their living conditions without prejudice to their rights of return," said Mustafa.

UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, is a humanitarian relief and development agency, providing education, health care, social services and emergency relief to over four million Palestine refugees living in the Syrian Arab Republic, Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan and Lebanon.

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