

**Commissioner-General's Statement**  
**Occasion of the visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI**  
**Aida Camp, West Bank, 13 May 2009**

Your Holiness:

I am honoured to extend to you a warm welcome, personally, and on behalf of the 29,000 UNRWA staff serving Palestine refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank.

There is immense significance in the presence of your Holiness, here in the occupied Palestinian territory and in Aida, a camp whose 500 square metres is home to 5,000 Palestine refugees. You have come to share a moment with us nearly sixty-one years to the day when the conflict of 1948 triggered Palestinian flight and dispossession, and just two days before UNRWA itself launches events to mark its sixtieth anniversary. The coincidence of these anniversaries is a reminder that far from being a distant, historical event - and as was illustrated during the recent conflict in Gaza - the plight of Palestine refugees is a current and painful reality.

UNRWA is well-acquainted with those realities. Over sixty decades, we have kept faith with Palestine refugees, constantly striving to ensure the delivery of quality services in primary education, primary health care, social services, microfinance and infrastructure. Through attending to fundamental human development needs, we contribute to stability among refugees and the communities hosting them.

For UNRWA and for the refugees we serve, the presence of your Holiness is an opportunity to draw inspiration and strength from the ideals you represent. Your Holiness has called for the human rights of refugees to be promoted and respected and you have championed the humanity and

dignity of all people, without distinction. Here in the occupied Palestinian territory, your call must be heard if the desire for liberation and justice is to be realized.

Your Holiness has also been a campaigner for peace and an advocate for the preeminence of creative reason. We trust that your message will resonate with those entrusted with the privilege of political authority and encourage them to work together to achieve a just and lasting peace.

I am delighted to mention that on the occasion of this visit, the Holy Father has gone beyond the symbolism of gracing us with his presence and has pledged to UNRWA a donation of 70,000 euros for the benefit of Palestine refugees in Aida Camp. This generous contribution, an excellent example of papal charity, will enable the construction of three new classrooms at Aida Boys School and thus help to enhance the quality of the learning environment for refugee children here.

Your Holiness:

Please accept UNRWA's gratitude, not only for your contribution, but also for acknowledging, through your presence, the legitimacy of Palestinian aspirations for a normal life free of the trials that have assailed them for more than sixty years. I am certain that your visit will serve to reinforce the belief all Palestinians share in the possibility of a better tomorrow. It is our hope that through the influence of your presence here, their faith in the future will soon be rewarded.