

Management Development in UNRWA

A Letter to Staff from the Deputy Commissioner-General

15 February 2006

Dear colleagues,

The Commissioner-General has asked me to coordinate the various aspects of a programme of reforms to the way UNRWA carries out its work. This letter is intended to explain to all staff how this process will develop over the coming months and years.

UNRWA has been in operation for almost 56 years and has regularly adapted itself to the changing needs of the refugees. Usually the changes are made because we have identified better ways of working, such as when the Agency's finance and human resources systems were overhauled. Sometimes they have come from outside the Agency, for example when a host government has introduced a new school subject.

As long as the needs of the refugees and the world in which UNRWA operates continue to change, then the Agency will regularly be adapting its work to fit the new circumstances. And because the services we deliver change from time to time, the way we deliver them often has to change too.

For this reason, in the past few years UNRWA has put in place a series of reforms to the way it operates. For many UNRWA staff, these may only be apparent - for example when they see a change in the way their salary slips are printed out: but that means that major work has been going on behind the scenes to upgrade the way the Agency's finances are dealt with.

The registration system for refugees is also being reformed, so that millions of family files can be scanned and available to registration staff at the touch of button. Other reforms have been ongoing in the education department as well as in the way the Agency tries to rehabilitate shelters and improve camp infrastructure.

The next stage of the process will consist in bringing together all these different ongoing changes – and some additional ones – so that they fit neatly and work well together. To help with this task, several donor countries have agreed to finance a team of consultants to look at several aspects of the Agency's activities. The team has just started its work.

Some of you may meet these consultants, who will want to talk to you about the way you work, how things could be improved and in what ways you can contribute to the process. After all, you are the experts and we will need your help! A small team of UNRWA staff will also be formed to work with me and these consultants to guide the process.

Among the areas likely to be examined will be, for example: how UNRWA plans its work for the future; how the Department of Operations carries out its tasks; how to improve internal communication; how UNRWA manages all the facts and figures at its disposal and how to strengthen the way we communicate with donors and others interested in our work.

Most probably the consultants will make suggestions such as: the need for additional resources to support those staff who are overworked; extra training and workshops to make

sure that everyone is able to do their job as well as possible; ways of improving the Agency's use of information and communication technology; and so on. These recommendations will allow us to launch in a more organized manner the process to strengthen the Agency, which as I said has already started in many areas but needs to be better coordinated and explained, inside and outside UNRWA.

It is expected that recommendations will be made in about three months. Then the Agency will need to talk to its donors and the host authorities to ensure that the recommendations have their support and are likely to be funded. Then, if the resources are made available, UNRWA will complete these changes, in stages, over the course of three years.

I would like to stress a key point. This reform process is not a job-cutting exercise. On the contrary, the Agency's management and the donors who fund it, are aware of how just how over-worked many staff are, so it is much more likely to bring extra jobs than to see any lost, and also to help us have a more efficient management structure. What it is intended to do is make UNRWA work better – this means being better able to plan our work, better able to supervise how it is carried out and when we complete a job, better able to judge whether it was the right thing to do. In this way we hope that the changes we make will help us deliver more and improved services to the refugees.

I will keep you informed regularly about the progress of this important initiative, in person or through written communications.

Filippo Grandi

Deputy-Commissioner-General