

24 September 2009

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki,
President of the 64th Session of the General Assembly,
At the Opening of the UNRWA High-Level Meeting**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to open this special high-level meeting of the General Assembly commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which we know as UNRWA. I wish, in particular, to acknowledge His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas for participating in this meeting. It is also my pleasure to welcome UNRWA's Commissioner-General, Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd, to this meeting. I also wish to thank the many Member States taking part in this meeting, especially the refugee host countries and donor countries, including the European Commission and the League of Arab States.

Our presence here serves to remind us of a simple truth: throughout the Arab-Israeli conflict, we have upheld our conscience and principles by supporting the conflict's most vulnerable victims: the Palestine refugees. The General Assembly established UNRWA on 8 December 1949, through Resolution 302 (IV). From an entire membership at that time of only 59 states, there were no votes opposed. To this day, the General Assembly similarly offers near-universal support for UNRWA's work and for renewing its mandate. This shared commitment to the well-being of the Palestinian refugees is a welcome departure from the political impasse that often seems to characterise United Nations' action regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For its part, UNRWA has shown an enduring commitment to the refugees. Its staff – most of them Palestinians – have braved every single conflict where UNRWA operates, often risking their lives to save others. UNRWA's local staff has also shown extraordinary dedication to UN principles, upholding humanitarian impartiality towards all parties to the conflict, often in the face of violence directly affecting their families. In UNRWA's staff, we see the very real embodiment of values that will help bring the Arab-Israeli conflict to an end. The United Nations is proud of the example they set.

The United Nations is equally proud of the example that UNRWA's leadership has set. I would like to acknowledge the efforts exerted by Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd, Commissioner-General of UNRWA. She has lived in the Gaza Strip for nine years, and has reached out tirelessly to the refugee population throughout UNRWA's areas of operation, thereby sustaining the special personal bonds with the refugees that have always been a unique feature of the Agency. As Ms. AbuZayd will be retiring at the end of this year, I would like on behalf of the General Assembly to use this occasion to extend our warm thanks and appreciation to her for dedicated service.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This ministerial meeting of the General Assembly is dedicated solely to the United Nations work on behalf of the Palestinian refugees. Through this meeting we shall hopefully renew the broad political support that UNRWA requires, and deserves. At the same time, let us not lose sight of another key objective: to ensure that UNRWA is adequately resourced, to allow it to operate effectively on a secure financial basis. Despite generous support from countries of the global North and South, and the burden carried by the host Governments of Jordan, Lebanon, and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as by the Palestinian Authority, resources have been scarce. Adequate funding for UNRWA has a larger purpose recognised by the Member States, as the Agency's services to the refugees are critical in promoting confidence in peace and greater regional stability. I speak for many when I say that I am confident that UNRWA will continue to enjoy great support.

The international community sought for 60 years to find a comprehensive, just and durable solution to the Arab Israeli conflict. Lacking such a solution, the international community remains morally obliged to sustain its commitment to the Palestinian refugees. I believe this commitment must also aim at reinvigorating the peace process to reach an early settlement of the Palestinian question in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority.