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HR/VP SPEECHES

Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the European Parliament Plenary Session on the Situation of UNRWA

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Check against delivery!

Grazie Presidente, let me first of all thank you for this debate. It is timely and it is important. It is important first of all because millions of people – men, women and children – depend on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for education, healthcare and social services, humanitarian assistance and employment. So, supporting UNRWA is a humanitarian duty and it is also in our collective interest for peace and security in the Middle East.

I would like to mention a few reasons why it is essential to support UNRWA, its work and why the European Union not only is supporting it but is going to continue to support it and argue for continued or increased support from other international partners. Firstly, the work they do is crucial for the prospects of an agreement between Israel and Palestine. It is a key political contribution that UNRWA is bringing to the prospect of relaunching a credible peace process, because a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the refugee question is one of the parameters of for peace negotiations, with the ultimate objective of achieving a two-state solution. The work that UNRWA does

provides the political space towards achieving a peace deal and building a Palestinian State.

Secondly, it is a matter of regional stability. This strikes me every time when international players don't see the reality on the ground in the countries that have been hosting, for decades; a huge number of Palestinian refugees. Reducing the activities of UNRWA would cause instability and even security threats all around the region. This is true for the West Bank and Gaza, but this is also true for Lebanon and Jordan. They are themselves facing enormous challenges on other fronts and this is obvious to all of us I believe; there is no need for me to go into details about the huge pressure that both Lebanon and Jordan have been facing. Investing in UNRWA is also investing in our collective regional security.

Thirdly, education. The European Union has always invested and will always continue to invest in the education of people and children to avoid any lost generation. For Palestinian kids, this means the possibility to keep hoping, to build their own future, and to believe in their own personal lives – which is not a minor thing when you are a child; and it means also fighting radicalisation. So it is also here an investment in our own security.

Fourthly, UNRWA is particularly important for the political process in Gaza, where work is ongoing, efforts are ongoing for the return of the Palestinian Authority, and Palestinian reconciliation is essential for the prospect of a viable State of Palestine. So for all these reasons, we are – and we will continue to be – strong and reliable supporters of the work of UNRWA. Together with our Member States, we are doing all we can to avoid repercussions from the US decision to ensure that UNRWA can continue to operate and to ensure a continued engagement from all other international actors, but also from the United States.

We have already increased our support in recent times. For 2018, the European Union will assist UNRWA by accelerating our first scheduled payment for this year, and I also count on donors around the world with whom we are in contact, including in coordination with other players. Here I would mention established partners for UNRWA, which already has important donors, but also all those that have so far been less engaged and who can step up their efforts in order to safeguard something that can be qualified as a global public good: the work that UNRWA does.

Peace between Israel and Palestine will clearly be built through negotiations, which requires a commitment from the two sides, but it must also be preserved every day on the ground and this is what UNRWA is doing with the Palestinian refugees. Investing in UNRWA is an interest we all share and the international community and the Palestinian refugees and the countries in the region can count on the European Union to continue to support its work.

Link to the video:

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