

**Intervention at the meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the
Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People**
Peter Mulrean, Director, UNRWA Representative Office in New York
4 September 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank the Committee and its bureau for permitting me to brief you today, as well as for the Committee's long-standing support of UNRWA and, more importantly, of Palestine refugees.

Mr. Chairman, last Friday, the United States announced that it would provide no additional funding to UNRWA. Allow me to express our deep regret and disappointment at the nature of the U.S. decision. The potential consequences of the decision are grave, which I will address in a moment. But it also signals a radical departure from what had been one of the most robust and rewarding partnerships in the humanitarian and development fields.

While recognizing that it is the sovereign right of any Member State to allocate its voluntary funding according to its wishes, the U.S. freezing of its UNRWA contributions in January was unexpected and its decision last week seems inconsistent with the cooperation agreement signed in early December 2017 between the United States and UNRWA. At the end of 2017, the U.S. recognized the robustness and integrity of the management of UNRWA and its resources, as well as how we addressed our multiple operational, security and financial challenges.

Therefore, we reject the criticism in the United States' announcement that UNRWA's schools, health centers, and emergency assistance programs are "irredeemably flawed". These very programs have a proven track record in creating one of the most successful human development processes and results in the Middle East. The international community, our donors and host countries have consistently praised UNRWA for its achievements and standards. The World Bank described our activities as a "global public good"

and recognized us for running one of the most effective school systems in the region, in which students regularly outperform their peers in public schools.

Mr. Chairman, since the United States unexpectedly decided in January to freeze \$300 million in funding, UNRWA has taken extraordinary and innovative efforts to address its financial shortfall. We have achieved remarkable results in terms of diversification and expanding partnerships. In addition, UNRWA has taken exceptional internal management measures to increase efficiencies and control costs. I would like to acknowledge with deep appreciation the more than 25 countries that advanced their expected annual contributions to earlier in the year to help us sustain operations.

I wish also to express immense gratitude to the 30 donors who have provided additional contributions of more than \$238 million to UNRWA's core and emergency activities this year, as well as to those who have signed new multi-year agreements with us. I wish to highlight the generous donations made by Gulf countries, specifically the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the historic support from the State of Kuwait. And it goes without saying that UNRWA's important work would be impossible were it not for the continued support of the host countries. I would take special note of the vigor and dedication of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Palestine for their tireless efforts on our behalf during this crisis. Egypt and Turkey have also played key roles in support of UNRWA, as the former and current chairs of our Advisory Commission.

I would also like to stress that the continuous engagement by the Secretary-General has been essential to mobilizing support for our Agency. We greatly appreciate his statement following the recent U.S. decision, in which he reiterated his confidence in, and support for, UNRWA. The Secretary-General also called on Member States to contribute additional funding in order to close UNRWA's remaining financial shortfall.

Because, despite the efforts I have just enumerated, UNRWA is still in critical need of more than \$200 million for the remainder of 2018. As things stand

now, we will run out of funding for much of our programming at the end of this month – four weeks from now.

Mr. Chairman, what is at stake is education for 526,000 girls and boys; primary health care accounting for more than three million patient visits last year; food for 1.7 million refugees, 1 million of them in Gaza. In short, UNRWA's assistance is crucial to the well being of millions of refugees. It is also directly linked to their dignity and their hope for the future. All of this contributes to a badly needed stability in the region.

For all of those reasons, it is vital that UNRWA maintain its services. We reiterate the call of the Secretary-General to all Member States to find the additional funding needed to reduce human suffering and to contribute to dignity and stability. UNRWA is working tirelessly to mobilize these resources and to keep our schools open and vital services running. We hope that Member States will set the opening of the next General Assembly session as the target date for producing a collective response to UNRWA's present challenges.

Mr. Chairman, we regret that the decision taken by the United States regarding UNRWA's funding appears to be linked to political considerations. UNRWA is a humanitarian organization and humanitarian principles call for assistance to be based on need and not linked to a political agenda. It is not the responsibility of UNRWA to find a political solution and UNRWA should not become a bargaining chip in political negotiations. Doing otherwise risks undermining the foundations of the international multilateral and humanitarian systems.

UNRWA received its mandate from the General Assembly. This mandate tasks UNRWA to provide assistance to Palestine refugees until a just and lasting solution is found to the plight of refugees. UNRWA has reported transparently on its activities since it began operations in 1950 and the General Assembly has approved these reports and consistently renewed UNRWA's mandate on the basis of its previous work. Only the General Assembly can change UNRWA's mandate and, until it does, we will continue to do everything we can to carry on with our efforts to address the very real needs of Palestine refugees. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.