



STATEMENTS BY THE SPOKESPERSON

Statement by the Spokesperson on UNRWA

Schools for hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children across Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria are re-opening this weekend.

This is possible also thanks to the work of UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) which runs schools for over 500.000 Palestine refugee children, and thanks to the many nations around the world who support and fund UNRWA's activities. The EU and its Member States are collectively the largest contributors to UNRWA's budget, and we are proud to support UNRWA's work in providing essential services to Palestine refugees.

Education is a fundamental part of the development of a viable Palestinian state, as are also hospitals and other basic services to which UNRWA's activities make an essential contribution. Our collective efforts, in the international community, to provide humanitarian and development assistance to Palestinians, in particular the younger generation, are inseparable part of our efforts to reach a negotiated two-state solution and a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

This is why the EU will continue its assistance to the Palestinians, including its support to UNRWA's activities, while we will also continue our efforts to reach a two-state solution - a solution that will include the issue of refugees, which is a final status issue that only the two parties can resolve through negotiations, with the support of the international community.

UNRWA has recently expanded its donor base and taken internal management measures to increase efficiencies and reduce costs. UNRWA should pursue these reforms and further engage in a transformative process. The EU is committed to continue discussing these matters with UNRWA so

as to secure the continuation and sustainability of the agency's work which is vital for stability and security in the region.

The regrettable decision of the US to no longer be part of this international and multilateral effort leaves a substantial gap and we hope that the US can reconsider their decision. The US have always played, and will continue to play, an essential role in any effort to achieve peace in the Middle East. The EU will continue to engage with the US and its other regional and international partners to work towards that common goal.

The EU and its Member States, and many others in the international community, including many Arab states, have pledged their support to the continuity of the work that UNRWA is doing. EU Foreign Ministers have discussed this issue at their informal meeting in Vienna this week. We will continue to discuss in the run-up to the UN General Assembly ministerial week, also together with our international and regional partners, how to ensure sustainable, continued and effective assistance to the Palestinians, including through UNRWA, at this difficult juncture.

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