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I. SPECIAL RAPORTEURS: VIOLENCE, HATE SPEECH, DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PALESTINIAN MINORITY MUST STOP

On 1 June, the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Mr. Fernand de Vareennes, issued the following [statement](#), which was endorsed by the Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and association, Mr. Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, Mr. S. Michael Lynk:

A UN human rights expert condemned attacks on Israel's Palestinian minority by extreme right-wing and vigilante groups, including settlers – at times with the reported backing of security forces – and urged Israel to fully and equally protect all of its citizens without discrimination.

Palestinians citizens of Israel, including the Bedouin, constitute an Arab minority representing about 1.5 million people or 20 percent of the population of Israel and face discrimination in many areas.

“Reports of extreme right-wing violence and disproportional use of force by law enforcement officials during protests in recent weeks, including in Sheikh Jarrah, Damascus Gate and the Al-Aqsa mosque, have led to some of the worst cases of violence against Palestinian citizens of Israel,” said Fernand de Vareennes, the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues.

“These attacks have been shared on social media and such platforms appear to have been used by extreme right wing groups to advocate hatred that constitutes incitement to violence with impunity to gather people to bring their weapons and attack Palestinians.”

The UN expert said the decades-long exclusion and discrimination, including of segregation between Arab and Jewish citizens and lack of equal treatment in terms of rights and privileges, has taken a heavy toll on the Palestinian minority. The absence of protection and bomb shelters in the Bedouin villages in the Naqab has also increased insecurity of the Bedouin minority, he added.

“Given the urgency of the situation, I call on the Government of Israel to firmly condemn all acts of violence, hatred and discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel,” said de Vareennes.

“The authorities must ensure its citizens immediately stop these attacks and that everyone is fully and equally protected without any form of discrimination. Police accused of failing to protect all residents and citizens of Israel without discrimination must be investigated.”

II. UNRWA COMMISSIONER-GENERAL AND DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS WEST BANK VISIT SHEIKH JARRAH REFUGEE FAMILIES

On 2 June, the UN Relief Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near-East (UNRWA) issued the following [press release](#):

Today, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini and Director of West Bank Operations Gwyn Lewis, visited the eight Palestine refugee families at the center of the dispossession campaign by Israeli settler organizations in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

The refugee families threatened with imminent eviction, their second displacement in living memory, are part of a community of 28 families who have called the neighbourhood home since 1954, following their forced displacement from and dispossession of their homes and lands in 1948.

The families reiterated the harassment they face from settler families in the presence of Israeli Security Forces. Further, entry to the neighbourhood has been blockaded by concrete barriers, restricting movement and prohibiting entry to anyone without registered residence within neighbourhood boundaries.

“The families I met in Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem today live in the constant fear of being forcibly displaced and losing their homes,” said the UNRWA Commissioner-General. “They are also traumatized by the increased violence by settlers in the presence of the Israeli Security Forces. To prevent further escalations of tensions in West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, forced displacement and administrative demolitions, contrary to international law, should end.”

III. UNRWA COMMISSIONER-GENERAL IN MOSCOW TO MEET OFFICIALS OVER RUSSIAN ROLE

On 11 June, UNRWA issued the following [press release](#) on the Commissioner-General’s visit to Russia:

The Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Philippe Lazzarini, visited Moscow on 9 June for a series of high-level meetings to strengthen the Agency’s strategic relationship with the Russian Federation.

During his first official visit to Moscow, Mr. Lazzarini met with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Sergey Vershinin and with the chairman of the international affairs committee of Russia’s upper house of parliament, Mr. Konstantin Kosachev. In both meetings, discussions included a briefing by UNRWA about the latest developments in Gaza after the conflict of last month. Russian officials also engaged the Commissioner-General on strategic issues related to the stabilizing role of UNRWA, including its role in contributing to an environment conducive to a resumption of peace discussions. In all his meetings, the UNRWA Commissioner-General reiterated the urgent need to ensure that the Agency remains financially steady and politically

supported. He thanked Russia for its commitment towards UNRWA through a multiyear agreement and called on the Federation to renew it and strengthen it in 2022 as it expires at the end of this year.

“Russia’s political support to UNRWA is key to helping the Agency stay on the world agenda in fora like the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, BRICS and others, said the UNRWA Commissioner-General. It is very important to have such a partner in places where it can help the Agency mobilize further support, both political and financial.”

Mr. Lazzarini described the efforts underway to position UNRWA as a key player in the reconstruction efforts in Gaza after the conflict. With its widescale architecture in Gaza, UNRWA can quickly rehabilitate its own facilities to receive and provide critical services to Palestine refugees. Across the region, health, education, social and other services contribute a sense of normality to the lives of refugees and help ease their distress and despair.

“In a region rife with crises, how do you minimize trauma, fear of the other and even hatred?” asked Mr. Lazzarini. “By providing quality services, such as education and promoting values that help shape young minds and prepare them for the future, UNRWA can contribute to stability and can help counter hatred and discrimination,” he noted.

These meetings were an opportunity for Mr. Lazzarini to discuss the humanitarian and operational situation in the Agency’s five fields of operations, specifically highlighting how the UNRWA continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Lazzarini also reminded his interlocutors of the Agency’s precarious financial situation and the need for sufficient, sustainable and more predictable funding for its operations, and the need to diversify its sources.

“Until the plight of Palestine refugees is resolved through a just and lasting solution, the international community is responsible for their wellbeing and must continue to support them through UNRWA by sharing the financial price,” said the Commissioner-General.

IV. UN SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ISRAELI PRACTICES DENOUNCES VIOLENCE AS IT CONCLUDES VIRTUAL MISSION TO REGION

On 14 June, the United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories issued the following [press statement](#):

The UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices* notes with deep concern the ongoing deterioration of the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory – in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza – as a result of the recent escalation in violence, the decades-long Israeli occupation, and Israeli policies and practices.

For the second year in a row, the Committee was unable to conduct annual briefings with Member States in Geneva and undertake their annual mission to the region due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As an alternative measure, the Committee organised a series of virtual meetings with UN agencies, Palestinian ministries and institutions and civil society organisations. The Committee also sent requests for written submissions, including to Member States.

During their meetings with interlocutors, the Committee heard about the impact of the May 2021 escalation on Palestinians civilians in Gaza and the West Bank including East Jerusalem. The Committee received briefings from human rights organisations which documented the killing of 256 Palestinians in Gaza including 66 children, the wounding of 1,291 people and the displacement of more than 60,000 as a result of Israeli attacks. The Committee is particularly concerned with information received on the damage to healthcare facilities in Gaza, noting that 38 health facilities were affected in 40 different incidents.

The Committee notes with concern the impact of the recent escalation on Palestinian refugees in Gaza and the West Bank including East Jerusalem, many of whom have already been displaced several times and face additional displacement now as a result of the recent escalation.

The Committee heard about the troubling situation in the West Bank where freedom of expression and peaceful association are continuously being curtailed by Israeli Security Forces.

Information provided by UN agencies indicates that clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians have risen, with a documented 50 percent increase in Israeli security operations in the West Bank this year, many of which resulted in injuries and loss of life.

It also heard about the extremely dire situation in East Jerusalem where numerous Palestinian families continue to be threatened with evictions by Israeli authorities and settlers including in the neighbourhoods of Batn Al-Hawa and Silwan. It received worrying information about the recent wave of arrests of journalists and activists particularly those supporting and covering events around the possible eviction of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah. The committee noted with concern information it received indicating that the Israeli judiciary supports in the majority of cases claims for ownership by settlers at the expense of Palestinians.

The Committee notes its concern with the expansion of settlements in the West Bank, the continued demolitions of homes even during the height of the pandemic, and the risk of eviction of Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem neighbourhoods. Incidents of settler violence also appear to be on the rise, with strong evidence that Israel is not complying with its obligations under international law to protect the Palestinian population and many times actually cooperate with and provide protection to the settlers instead.

The Committee heard about specific concerns with regard to access to health for Palestinians, including prisoners, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Gaza, movement and exit restrictions related to COVID-19, the recent escalation which reportedly destroyed a number of health facilities and the long-standing permit requirement in order to travel for hospital referrals, continued to impede Palestinians' access to healthcare. The Committee notes with concern the impact of the recent military escalation on the health infrastructure in Gaza, which was already heavily overstretched due to COVID-19.

The Committee notes with heightened concern the ongoing lack of accountability on allegations for human rights violations by the Israeli Security Forces and settlers, which further aggravated the cycle of violence.

The Committee will dedicate part of their upcoming report to the General Assembly on the issue of right to health, presenting its next report during the General Assembly's 76th session in November 2021.

In this context of increased Israeli discriminatory practices against the Palestinians, and in order to cease the deterioration of the human rights situation in the Palestinians, members of the Committee stress the importance of the peace process and the two-State solution.

V. SPECIAL COORDINATOR WENNESLAND BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON IMPLEMENTATION OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2334

On 24 June, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, made the following [statement](#) to the Security Council.

I am devoting my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to the eighteenth report on the implementation of Security Council resolution [2334](#) (2016) ([S/2021/584](#)). The written report members have already received covers the period between 23 March and 11 June.

Before turning to recent developments, I wish to reiterate that the cessation of hostilities reached last month between Israel and Hamas remains very fragile. The United Nations works closely with all concerned parties and partners, including Egypt, to solidify a ceasefire, allow the entry of urgent humanitarian assistance and stabilize the situation in Gaza. I urge all sides to refrain from unilateral steps and provocations, take steps to reduce tensions and allow those efforts to succeed. All sides must do their part to facilitate ongoing discussions to stabilize the situation on the ground and avoid another devastating escalation in Gaza.

I also wish to acknowledge the new Israeli coalition Government, which was sworn in on 13 June, under the leadership of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Alternate Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid. I congratulate the members of the new Government and look forward to working with them to advance the two-State solution and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

I turn now to developments that have occurred since the submission of the written report.

In occupied East Jerusalem, 15 Palestinian households still face the imminent threat of eviction by the Israeli authorities from their homes in Shaykh Jarrah. The High Court has scheduled a hearing on 2 August to consider a leave to appeal request from some of the families. Separately, the Jerusalem District Court postponed until 8 July its decision on an appeal against an eviction order related to two residential buildings in the Batan Al-Hawa neighbourhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem.

Unfortunately, violent incidents have continued on a daily basis throughout the occupied Palestinian territory since the submission of the written report. Clashes have repeatedly broken out in Beita village, near Nablus in the West Bank, in the context of protests against the construction of a new Israeli settlement outpost, Eviatar. Although a military order was issued on 9 June, designating the outpost a closed zone and ordering settlers to vacate, settler and significant Israeli security forces presence persisted, and Palestinian protests continued. On 11 June, Israeli security

forces shot dead a 16-year-old Palestinian and on 17 June, another 16-year-old Palestinian succumbed to his wounds from shots sustained by Israeli security forces the previous night, after he reportedly threw an explosive device towards them. Since 3 May, five Palestinians have been killed and some 100 Palestinians have been injured by live ammunition in and around that area.

On 12 June, Israeli civilian security guards shot dead a Palestinian woman at the Qalandiya checkpoint near Jerusalem, after she reportedly ran towards them holding a knife. On 15 June, several thousand right-wing Israeli activists, including members of the Knesset, marched through Jerusalem's Old City, with many participants chanting racist slogans against Arabs and Muslims. The march, initially set for 10 May, was held amid a heavy Israeli police presence after having been rerouted by Israeli authorities from its planned trajectory throughout the Muslim quarter of the Old City. In protests and clashes that occurred in the context of the march, in East Jerusalem, as well as other parts of the West Bank, 66 Palestinians, including 12 children, were injured by rubber bullets, sound grenades and physical assaults.

On the same day, rallies were organized throughout the Gaza strip by national and Islamic forces, protests erupted at the fence and militants in Gaza released incendiary balloons towards Israel, starting dozens of fires. In response to the incendiary balloons, from 16 to 17 June, Israeli Defense Forces targeted what they said were five Hamas facilities on the strip, causing damage but no injuries.

On 16 June, a Palestinian woman was shot dead by Israeli security forces at the Hizma checkpoint near Jerusalem after reportedly attempting to carry out a ramming and stabbing attack against Israeli soldiers. Between 19 and 23 June, confrontations continued between Israeli civilians and Palestinian residents in Shaykh Jarrah.

On 23 June, Palestinian activist and parliamentary candidate Nizar Banat was pronounced dead, hours after being arrested by Palestinian Security Forces at a house in Hebron. According to the victim's family, the Forces aggressively beat and physically assaulted the victim during the arrest.

I will turn now to several observations concerning the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period. I remain deeply troubled by continued Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I am concerned in particular about the approval of a plan to expand the Har Homa settlement in East Jerusalem. If implemented, the plan would further consolidate the continuum of illegal settlements separating East Jerusalem from Bethlehem and other Palestinian communities in the southern part of the West Bank. I am also concerned by the continued establishment of settlement outposts, which are also illegal under Israeli law. As we have seen, the recent establishment of Eviatar has already led to protests and clashes with tragic outcomes.

I again underscore, in no uncertain terms, that Israeli settlements constitute a flagrant violation of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and international law. They are a major obstacle to the achievement of a two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. The advancement of all settlement activity must cease immediately.

The continued demolition and seizure of Palestinian structures, including humanitarian projects and schools, is also deeply concerning. I call on Israeli authorities to put an end to the

demolition of Palestinian property and the displacement of Palestinians and to approve plans that would enable those communities to build legally and address their development needs.

The reporting period witnessed an alarming increase in the level of violence between Israelis and Palestinians, including hostilities between Israel and factions in Gaza at a scale and intensity not seen in years. I am especially concerned by the attempt to exploit the sensitive status of Jerusalem and to use it to justify a broader armed conflict. Those events have only deepened divisions between Israelis and Palestinians and are making progress towards peace an even greater challenge. The incitement and the violence must stop immediately.

The indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian population centres from highly populated civilian neighbourhoods by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and others is prohibited by international humanitarian law. Palestinian militants must cease that practice immediately. The Israeli authorities must also abide by the rules of international humanitarian law governing armed conflict and take all feasible precautions to spare civilians and civilian objects in the conduct of military operations.

I am appalled that children continue to be victims of violence. Children should be afforded special protection from violence. They should never be the target of violence or put in harm's way, nor should they be encouraged to commit or participate in acts of incitement or violence.

I am also deeply concerned by the increased intensity of settler-related violence and by violent attacks between Israeli and Palestinian civilians in the occupied West Bank. I urge Israel to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population in line with its responsibilities under international law. The perpetrators of violence on all sides must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice.

I also note with concern reports of armed civilians carrying out attacks against Palestinians in proximity to the Israeli security forces. I reiterate that the security forces must exercise maximum restraint and may use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect lives. Israeli and Palestinian authorities must carry out thorough, independent, impartial and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force.

On too many occasions during the reporting period, officials exacerbated tensions and violence with unacceptable rhetoric and provocative actions that contributed to the dangerous dynamics on the ground. Violence and incitement must be clearly condemned and unequivocally rejected by all. In that context, I commend initiatives by civil society organizations and other leaders calling for peace, reconciliation and the rejection of violence.

The fate of two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two Israeli soldiers held by Hamas in Gaza remains an important humanitarian concern. I call upon Hamas to release the full information on their status immediately, as required by international humanitarian law. I also remain concerned by the continued Israeli practice of withholding the bodies of killed Palestinians and call on Israel to return withheld bodies to their families, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

Turning back to Gaza, in the context of a fragile cessation of hostilities, the United Nations is continuing to coordinate the delivery of urgent humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. I

highlight the \$95 million humanitarian flash appeal launched on 27 May and thank members for the pledges and contributions made so far. All parties must also facilitate unimpeded access for humanitarian relief. We are now moving quickly to ensure that there is a well-coordinated international response focused on the two million people in Gaza who have suffered for far too long.

I am particularly concerned that the Kerem Shalom crossing to Gaza from Israel has been effectively closed for over five weeks, with some narrow exceptions for food, animal feed and limited humanitarian items. Kerem Shalom should be open for regular, non-sensitive trade.

In the coming days, the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union will soon release a rapid damage needs assessment that will estimate the longer term reconstruction and recovery needs in Gaza.

In the first week of July, the donor group of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians will convene an emergency meeting at which it will discuss how to quickly mobilize donor support in a common effort with the Palestinian Authority.

The \$150-million shortfall in the programme budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East remains a major concern. I welcome the resumption of funding from the United States in April and call on Member States to ensure that the Agency has the resources needed to conduct its operations.

It is also critical that the Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts continue. The United Nations stands firm in its support of Egypt in that regard, and I call upon all Palestinian factions to make serious efforts to ensure the reunification of Gaza and the occupied West Bank under a single, legitimate, democratic national Government. Gaza is and must remain an integral part of a future Palestinian State, as part of a two-State solution.

In that context, I note that the postponement of the Palestinian elections has compounded frustrations and undermined hope for the Palestinian national project. I commend the tireless efforts of the Palestinian Central Elections Commission, which ensured that all technical aspects were effectively implemented.

I am deeply concerned by the news today of the death of political candidate and activist Nizar Banat, who died in the context a Palestinian security forces arrest operation. I call for an independent investigation into his death and for those responsible to be held accountable.

In conclusion, I would once again like to highlight the significant risks we face over the coming period as we confront the prospect of a renewed escalation. While immediate international efforts are rightly focused on solidifying the cessation of hostilities, providing humanitarian assistance and beginning the process of Gaza's reconstruction, recent events have also highlighted the urgent need to re-establish a political horizon and restore hope to Palestinians and Israelis.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting the parties in resolving the conflict and ending the occupation in line with the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements in pursuit of achieving the vision of two

States — Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State — living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

Even as we focus on the pressing challenges in Gaza, I reiterate our determination to work with Israelis and Palestinians, fellow members of the Middle East Quartet and key regional and international partners to lay the groundwork for a return to meaningful negotiations towards a viable two-State solution.

VI. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR ANNOUNCES FUEL DELIVERIES TO GAZA

On 27 June, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, issued the following [statement](#):

Under the United Nations framework, the Qatari funded fuel deliveries for the Gaza Power Plant will resume tomorrow, Monday, as per the previous agreement between the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the State of Qatar.

I welcome all steps taken to de-escalate the situation. UN will continue to work with all concerned parties and partners to solidify a ceasefire and help the people of Gaza.

VII. UNRWA COMMISSIONER-GENERAL ADDRESSES ADVISORY COMMISSION

On 30 June, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini made the following [statement](#) to the virtual meeting of the Advisory Commission:

I am pleased to be with you here virtually today and hope that the next meeting of the Advisory Commission will be in person before the end of the year.

Let me start by thanking Mr Sultan Mohammed Al Shamsi, Assistant Minister for International Development Affairs of the United Arab Emirates for chairing the AdCom this last year.

I would like to also acknowledge with appreciation the important role that Dr. Hassan Mneymneh, President of the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, has played as Vice-Chair.

Next, I wish to extend my special thanks to Mr Gerhard Krause, Head of Cooperation of the Representative Office of the EU in Jerusalem, for stepping in to chair the Sub-Committee.

My gratitude also goes to the Vice-Chairs, Mr Magdi M Elderini, Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Egypt in Amman and Mr Erling Hoem, Deputy Head of the Representative Office of Norway in Jerusalem.

I welcome India as the latest member of the Advisory Commission, as recognized by a General Assembly resolution at the end of last year. The presence of India reflects a broader and more diverse donor base, which is essential for the future and the sustainability of UNRWA.

I notice that I have acknowledged a group of friends and supportive colleagues who are all men. I hope that female colleagues will also take part in the future in leading the ADCOM.

I wish to welcome the re-engagement of the United States, a longstanding partner of UNRWA whose solid support is key to the Agency.

We are also honored by the presence of China as guest and Ms Wang Xi, Deputy Head of Mission of the Representative Office of China in Ramallah, will join us tomorrow.

And last, I would also like to thank the Head of the Advisory Commission Secretariat, Mr Asif Husain- Naviatti, who led the work of this Commission with professionalism and dedication. I wish him all the best for his future projects.

Operational Update

Since we last met, the situation in the region has further deteriorated.

Eleven days of a devastating conflict sent **Gaza** years back, breaking many lives, livelihoods and dreams. A few weeks ago, I cautioned the UN Security Council against the next round of conflict in the absence of serious efforts for a political breakthrough.

If there is no willingness for a genuine political track that could bring the hope for peace, then we all in the humanitarian and development industry will continue helping, building and then watch our efforts collapse. Recently a friend of mine reminded me that insanity is to expect a different outcome with the same recipe. To avoid a relapse, we need to bring back a sense of normality in the lives of Palestinians in Gaza.

While the ceasefire that ended active hostilities still holds, many triggers to the violence remain unchanged in Gaza and in the occupied **West Bank, including East Jerusalem**. Hundreds of people continue to live with the daily threat of evictions and demolitions, including eight Palestine refugee families who live in Shaikh Jarrah. Also, Palestine refugees face continuous settler violence acting in a climate of impunity. Elements of the Israeli Security Forces confront Palestinian demonstrators with excessive use of live ammunition and the indiscriminate use of tear gas.

In Lebanon, over 50 per cent of the population lives under the poverty line, including almost all Palestine refugees, who were already among the most marginalized communities in the country. Even access to daily commodities and services have become a struggle for almost everyone in Lebanon. Palestine refugees in camps are so desperate that I called Lebanon an internal emergency on my last visit there in April.

In Syria, 10 years of conflict have left the country and its economy shattered. Many Palestine refugees in Syria report living on one meal a day. Over 90 per cent of them are under the poverty line.

Jordan suffers the ripple effect of events in the West Bank and the long-term impact of the war in Syria, in addition to its own challenges. Palestine refugees, especially those from Syria, face immense economic hardship and only have UNRWA to turn to.

COVID-19 and its socio-economic impact remain rife, as vaccination coverage remains low in the region. Host countries urgently need more vaccines to prevent further waves of infections and for the economies to recover.

In this highly unstable environment, the Palestine refugee communities long for a sense of stability that only a strong UNRWA can provide. Essential services and humanitarian relief are a lifeline for many refugees and often the only chance for a better future for the youth.

Let me give you some examples:

First, and maybe most importantly, is the quality education that UNRWA has been known for decades.

Ghada Krayem, a young Palestine refugee in Gaza, was one of the first women to take a solar energy training course at the UNRWA Gaza Training Centre. That training course won the Green Skills Award from the EU's European Training Foundation.

Like her, more than 540,000 children and 8000 young people learn in UNRWA schools and in Technical and vocational training centres. A strong component of the school educational journey with UNRWA is our flagship programme on Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance. This education is the antidote to hatred in a region rife with violence. UNRWA school children are the actors of positive change in their communities today. They are the responsible citizens of tomorrow.

Second, 2.4 million Palestine refugees across the region rely on UNRWA as the only steady source of support for their most basic needs, including food and shelter. A strong UNRWA prevents them from falling deeper into poverty and its related negative coping mechanisms, such as child labor, early marriage, migration through dangerous routes or, at times, radicalization.

Third, UNRWA plays an essential role in containing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in overcrowded refugee camps across the region. It continues to work closely with local authorities in rolling-out vaccination campaigns through its health centers.

Fourth, between being an employer, creating livelihoods opportunities and making microloans available, UNRWA interventions, albeit relatively small scale, have had a positive economic and social impact on the lives of Palestine refugees. Since the 1990s, our Microfinance programme has contributed towards sustaining or creating close to 700,000 jobs in the region. The UNRWA TVET centres are pioneers in their fields. They graduate highly skilled and talented young people, 75 per cent of whom found employment in 2020 despite the pandemic.

Fifth, the latest conflict in Gaza was a stark reminder that UNRWA plays a critical role in emergency situations. In a place where there is nowhere to hide from airstrikes and rockets, over 70,000 people found refuge in UNRWA Designated Emergency Shelters. We need to invest in preparedness, especially at a time people fear a new round of violence could start anytime.

Sixth, as the international community plans the recovery and reconstruction in Gaza, UNRWA is probably the best-placed entity to help rebuild damaged infrastructure and attend to the immeasurable level of trauma in the Palestine refugee community, particularly among children.

I can continue with more examples of the irreplaceable role that UNRWA plays as a source of wellbeing for Palestine refugees and a source of stability for the region and a contribution to peace.

I also want to stress, after having heard from skeptics and critics that UNRWA is a bottomless bucket, that UNRWA is one of the most cost-efficient organizations within the humanitarian and development sector.

A recent joint World Bank/UNHCR report hailed the quality of UNRWA education and its cost efficiency compared to local, regional and international indicators at less than US\$ 900 per year per school child.

Having a unique mandate, UNRWA runs directly state-like services that compare to those under ministries. Our national salaries grid compares to that of the public sector in the host countries and is below the UN local salary scales in each of our fields of operations.

In line with the Grand Bargain, we are a highly “localized” organization with an average of one international staff for more than 180 national staff, the vast majority of whom come from the community we assist and protect.

The Agency has operated on three zero-growth budgets over the last six years, including for 2021. Despite years of austerity and cost control measures, UNRWA staff continue to innovate and adapt to the changing operational environment, as demonstrated during the pandemic.

Such measures have, however, come at a price that we pay, over time, in the quality of our services, the difficulty for the Agency to deal with any unforeseen emergency, and the drive and morale of my colleagues when the cost control measures last too long.

I know the pressure that my local colleagues have been under while UNRWA underwent one financial roadblock after the other. This has been a nerve-wracking experience for the Palestine refugees, the staff and the host countries.

A weakened UNRWA should be in the interest of no one. Unpredictability fuels instability. Investing in the human development of Palestine refugees remains one of the easiest and best investments for those keen to invest in the stability of the region.

Financial update

Let me now turn to the financial situation.

At the end of 2020, the Agency barely dodged financial collapse thanks to additional efforts of some committed donors, a US\$ 30 million CERF loan and the deferral of salaries to staff. UNRWA started the year 2021 with a carryover of US\$ 75 million in liabilities.

CERF loans have been critical over the last years to manage our cash flow and prevent an interruption in the delivery of services. Going forward, and until we jointly manage to put the Agency on a sustainable financial footing, it will be essential for the Agency to remain eligible to access the loan facility, as a last resort.

While we might seem to be in a better financial position compared to this time last year, we are not yet financially stable. We continue to live month by month. The return of the United States support has allowed us to reduce the shortfall. In return though, some major regional partners are still absent and other have reduced their contributions this year.

Today, halfway into 2021, the Programme Budget shortfall, based on estimated projections of donor contributions, remains at US\$ 150 million, equivalent to over two months of operations. Our most immediate cash flow crisis will hit us in August, though it could hit us as early as this month, should any disbursement from donors anticipated for July be delayed.

By mid-August, we require US\$ 30 million to cover the salaries of our 28,000 staff and critical needs like medicine and cash and food assistance for the poorest. In September, the Agency expects new disbursements that will allow it to continue operating that month.

Our Emergency Appeals for the Syria regional crisis and for the occupied Palestinian territory also remain seriously underfunded at respectively 35 per cent and 62 per cent. Funds are urgently needed to sustain food and cash assistance to over two million refugees across the region and continue our protection work in the West Bank.

Let me now thank you for your swift response to our Humanitarian and Early Recovery Appeal that has already started to support our efforts in Gaza after the latest conflict.

But let me also remind all that without a fully funded Programme Budget, - the backbone of all our development and humanitarian services-, the Agency will be unable to alleviate the suffering in Gaza and the mounting desperation in camps in Lebanon and fulfill its stabilizing role.

In March this year, I informed you that, contrary to previous years, it was not possible to implement additional cost control and austerity measures without these seriously affecting the scope of services to Palestine refugees. I urge you to consider very carefully what a reduction in services will mean for the rights and wellbeing of Palestine refugees and for their sense of stability and security.

Today, I appeal to all our partners present to explore all possible ways and means to provide additional support to the Agency, advance planned contributions or redirect contributions from other portals to the Programme Budget by mid- August. Some might even consider creative avenues such as long-term loans for revolving funds or non- reimbursable long-term loans.

I would like to acknowledge the cooperation and support of the UNRWA staff unions, Host governments and donors during these difficult times. I particularly refer to my decision to freeze the staff salary increments for 12 months with the understanding that these will be resumed when the financial situation of the Agency improves. This has been one of several measures that will help prevent a suspension of services to eligible Palestine refugees across our five fields of operations.

Allow me here to pause and thank my senior management and their teams for their relentless efforts to keep the UNRWA ship sailing, at times even against the winds. Between repeated financial crises, the latest war in Gaza, the pandemic that hit the region hard and politically motivated campaigns against UNRWA – especially targeting its stellar education programme –

the UNRWA teams never stopped working and delivering. This is something commendable and I am extremely proud and inspired by my colleagues' commitment and drive.

I also acknowledge that the last two years have been extremely demanding and stressful for the senior management of the Agency, and it is my priority in the next months to work with my senior team to strengthen the organizational culture, the team dynamic and the working environment. The senior management retreat early September– the first in person retreat since I started as Commissioner General – will be entirely dedicated to address unresolved, sometimes amplified, management issues recently identified by a study I commissioned.

During this AdCom session, we will have important discussions about enabling a modern and effective UNRWA to continue delivering on its mandate towards Palestine refugees.

The international conference that will take place in October under the leadership of Jordan and Sweden aims to move the Agency from short-term and precarious planning to long-term and solid sustainability.

To be successful, the international conference will confirm that the transformative journey of a Palestine refugee is punctuated by the regular positive interventions of UNRWA. Through this journey, we want to bring once more our services in line with our times, especially in the age of digitalization. We want to bridge the digital divide and continue helping young Palestine refugees compete with their peers elsewhere. We want to preserve the achievements of your investment in their human development over decades.

The UNRWA strategic blueprint is premised on the delivery of modern and quality services to Palestine refugees at a predictable budget of US \$ 800 million per year, with an initial one-time capital injection to restore depleted UNRWA assets after years of austerity and enable the transformation of UNRWA. I appeal for your active participation in the discussions in the run up to the conference and for commitment to fair financial burden sharing.

A modern UNRWA is one whose services enable young Palestine refugees to grow and compete with their peers elsewhere. A modern UNRWA is one that is in line with the times, uses digital and IT technology to increase the efficiency of its services and broaden their coverage.

From mobile apps to full follow-up on pregnant women and diabetic patients, to telemedicine, to a digital learning platform and an IT hub in Gaza servicing the whole UN family, UNRWA has a lot of advances already. We should build on these successes to take the Agency to the next level and make sure Palestine refugees are never left behind. COVID-19 showed us that there is a digital divide between people. We at UNRWA aim to bridge that divide for Palestine refugees.

A strong UNRWA is an Agency that empowers Palestine refugees, helps youth fulfill their potential in line with the 2030 Agenda and contributes to an environment conducive to peace and stability.

A strong UNRWA is also one that is shielded from political attacks that seek to undermine its legitimacy as a way to erode the rights of Palestine refugees.

While acknowledging the highly political and politicized environment that UNRWA operates in, it is unacceptable to constantly be accused of irrational allegations such as incitement to violence or anti-Semitism. The Agency has zero-tolerance for incitement, hatred or discrimination in any shape or form.

We will spare no effort to uphold humanitarian principles and UN values and continue to strengthen the adherence of our staff and our education content to these values and principles. We will also continue to address immediately and firmly any breaches and will inform promptly our closest partners if such breaches occur.

I call on our closest partners present today to be proud of and defend their investment in the UNRWA education programme. I also invite you to extend an invitation to your Parliaments to visit UNRWA operations and, in particular, meet with our students.

I could not end these remarks without making reference to the exceptional events that followed statements made by the Director of UNRWA Gaza Field office. I wish to pause for a moment to reiterate my full support to Matthias Schmale and his deputy. I also acknowledge the reactions, at times divisive even inside UNRWA, to his comments and recognize the pain that these have provoked. I repeat that any civilian death is a death too many and is unacceptable.

But some of the slogans, statements and parodies directed against an UNRWA director amounted to threats against his safety. That was not acceptable. Some viewed this problem as a problem between the de facto authorities and the Agency or between the unions and the Agency. I can say with a high level of confidence, after my stays in Gaza, that the reaction came from the entire Palestinian spectrum. The day after my statement, authorities reiterated full security guarantee to any humanitarian workers operating in Gaza.

In concluding, let me stress again that it is in no one's interest to have a weakened UNRWA, struggling to deliver services and distracting scarce resources to defend its reputation.

We have a unique opportunity in the coming few months to finalize the plans for a strong and modern UNRWA; an UNRWA able to play its stabilizing role in a region rife with violence and volatility; an UNRWA creating new opportunities and hope for a better future for Palestine refugees.

I am convinced that together we can achieve this.

Thank you.
