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Chair: Ms. Joyini (South Africa)
later: Mr. Woszczek (Vice-Chair) (Poland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 49: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
(continued) (A/78/13, A/78/279, A/78/305 and A/78/314)

1. **Mr. Alizada** (Azerbaijan), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was a lifeline for Palestine refugees, as proven by the grave crisis that was currently unfolding. In the Gaza Strip, the civilian population was suffering immense loss of life, widespread destruction of homes and massive forced displacement as Israel, the occupying power, continued to carry out indiscriminate attacks, including on refugee camps and UNRWA schools and facilities, where 640,000 Palestinian civilians were sheltering. The Movement reiterated its strong support for UNRWA, whose mandate was to provide humanitarian, development and emergency assistance to more than 5.9 million Palestine refugees registered with the Agency across the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Agency's operations remained indispensable until a just solution to their plight on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions was attained. The international community should step up its support for UNRWA, which must be provided with sustained, predictable and uninterrupted funding, as repeatedly called for by the General Assembly and the Secretary-General.

2. The prevailing conditions of instability, violence and declining socioeconomic conditions meant that Palestine refugees faced further marginalization and poverty. The ongoing Israeli occupation and associated armed conflicts, collective punishment and forced displacement constituted a severe protection crisis. Palestine refugees' rights were being trampled on by Israel, the occupying power, including through its illegal settlement campaign and attempts to further entrench its occupation of Palestinian land. The Movement condemned any attempts to forcibly displace or transfer Palestinians, either within the occupied territories or to neighbouring countries.

3. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip had been dire prior to the recent crisis and was worsening. For sixteen years, Gaza had been crippled by an illegal blockade imposed by Israel, which continued to cause significant humanitarian, social and economic suffering, increasing dependence on humanitarian aid and amplifying needs that UNRWA was compelled to address with its limited resources. Now, Israel had

imposed a total siege on the Gaza Strip, obstructing the delivery and availability of essential services and undermining the potential and hopes of an entire people. The illegal blockade on Gaza must be fully and immediately halted. The crisis in Gaza must be comprehensively addressed, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, as part of the overall effort to bring an end to the illegitimate Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, since 1967.

4. The continuing and chronic financial shortfalls faced by UNRWA were deeply concerning and created significant apprehension among the Palestine refugee community, including thousands of UNRWA staff. The necessary funding should be provided to enable the Agency to meet the humanitarian needs of refugees and continue to play a stabilizing role in the region. Continuing efforts should be made to bring the illegal occupation of Palestine to an end and find a just solution to the issue on the basis of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, and to enable the Palestinian people to realize their inalienable rights and legitimate aspirations, including the right to self-determination and freedom in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

5. **Mr. Muhith** (Bangladesh) said that it was the collective failure of the international community that, in the past 29 days, 72 UNRWA personnel had been killed and 47 of the Agency's installations had been damaged in unjustifiable attacks by a Member State of the United Nations. The United Nations, particularly the Security Council, had failed to take action to stop those killings, whose toll was the highest number of United Nations aid workers killed in a conflict in such a short span of time.

6. Over the past 75 years, Israel had been violating international human rights and humanitarian law and committing war crimes and genocide, including the killing of civilians, torture and forced displacement. In the current crisis, however, the dreadful atrocities had crossed all limits; the indiscriminate and disproportionate bombardment of Gaza by Israel had killed more than 9,000 people and injured more than 22,000 since 7 October 2023. An additional 2,000 people had been reported missing, and more than 1.5 million Palestinians had been displaced internally in an area of just 140 square miles. There must be an immediate ceasefire to stop the further killing of innocent civilians and ensure that life-saving humanitarian assistance could reach civilians throughout the Gaza Strip. Efforts to block humanitarian assistance were unacceptable and unjustifiable. The

humanitarian aid entering through Rafah crossing was welcome but insufficient.

7. Bangladesh commended UNRWA for the critical services it provided to millions of Palestine refugees. Despite a complex operational environment and financial challenges, the Agency had made progress toward modernization and digital transformation to improve the quality and accessibility of its services. Threats and attacks against UNRWA staff, including detentions and kidnappings, had been on the rise even before 7 October 2023. The perpetrators of those crimes must be brought to justice. Restrictions on the freedom of movement of UNRWA personnel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, were also concerning, as were Israel's continuous breaches of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. Urgent action was needed to address the funding gap in UNRWA's operations. The Agency must have sufficient, predictable and multi-year funding in addition to the Flash Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory 2023. For its part, Bangladesh had pledged \$50,000 for UNRWA in 2023.

8. The current crisis had been created by decades of oppression, killings and illegal occupation by Israel. The only solution to the crisis was the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.

9. **Mr. Diome** (Senegal) said that his country condemned the attacks against civilians and supported any initiatives aimed at de-escalation, including steps to release the hostages. The ongoing situation in Gaza was a disgrace to the international community, which was becoming less attentive to the plight of the Palestinian people. The air strikes carried out by Israel on the Jabalia refugee camp and on ambulances near Shifa' Hospital were unacceptable and unjustifiable. The tightening of the 16-year blockade on Gaza was transforming what was already an open-air prison into a cemetery for its more than 2 million residents who were being deprived of water, electricity, health care and fuel. A ceasefire was urgently needed to put an end to the ongoing humanitarian disaster, in accordance with General Assembly resolution [ES-10/21](#).

10. UNRWA required support from the international community to save the people of Gaza. The Agency and its implementing partners should be guaranteed unimpeded access. Israel, as the occupying Power, should demonstrate restraint and refrain from attacking civilians, hospitals, places of worship, United Nations facilities and humanitarian, medical and media personnel. Senegal condemned the attacks on UNRWA facilities and called for the protection of the Agency's

remaining facilities, where some 600,000 displaced persons had taken refuge. The people of Gaza must be able to receive assistance without being forced into exile.

11. Senegal urged Member States to contribute to the Flash Appeal, which was aimed at collecting \$294 million to meet the needs of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. UNRWA required adequate, sustainable and predictable financing, and the funds allocated to the Agency through the regular budget should be re-evaluated. The tragedy in Gaza should not overshadow the needs of Palestine refugees in the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, where the Agency's financial shortfall had a destabilizing impact. Support for UNRWA, however, would make only a small contribution toward alleviating the consequences of a tragedy that had dragged on despite the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council since 1948; the challenges facing the Palestine refugees could be overcome only through a two-State solution, in which Israel and Palestine would coexist side-by-side within internationally recognized borders.

12. **Mr. Abuzied Shamseldin Ahmed Mohamed** (Sudan) said that his delegation supported a just, lasting and comprehensive political solution to the question of Palestine, leading to the establishment of an independent, sovereign State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds al-Sharif (Jerusalem) as its capital, based on the two-State solution, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The inalienable right of return must be upheld, in accordance with General Assembly resolution [194 \(III\)](#).

13. In recent weeks, thousands of Palestinian civilians had been killed and critical infrastructure had been targeted. The role of UNRWA in such a high-risk environment was more important than ever. His delegation extended its condolences to the families of the staff members who had been killed. More must be done to protect civilians and essential infrastructure, uphold international humanitarian law and allow the unhindered delivery of aid.

14. UNRWA worked commendably to alleviate the suffering of Palestine refugees by providing an array of essential services in spite of the its own hardship and funding shortfall. Time and again over decades, UNRWA had demonstrated its resilience in the face of difficulties, and it therefore needed support in its bid to cover its shortfall. The role of UNRWA would remain indispensable until the question of Palestine was settled justly and definitively. Any attempt to alter or undermine the Agency's mandate or its responsibility to serve Palestine refugees must be rejected.

15. **Mr. Al-Dahlaki** (Iraq) said that his delegation commended the staff of UNRWA for their efforts to contain the humanitarian catastrophe, and extended its condolences to the families of those who been killed in the barbaric attack launched by the Israeli occupation forces. Far more than a humanitarian agency, UNRWA was on the frontlines of the struggle to uphold Palestine refugees' right of return. It was a legal tool against the occupying Power's scheme to take the refugee question off the table.

16. The Israeli occupation forces were bombarding the Gaza Strip around the clock and were preventing the entry of such vital supplies as water, food, fuel and electricity. The international community must fulfil its collective responsibility to put a stop to those atrocities. A comprehensive ceasefire must be concluded, and humanitarian and medical assistance must immediately be delivered to the Gaza Strip. An independent State of Palestine must be established, with unqualified and unconditional membership in the United Nations.

17. **Mr. Baghdadi** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation condemned in the strongest possible terms the ongoing barbaric, lawless attack on the Gaza Strip. Hospitals, schools and civilian populations, including staff of international organizations, were being targeted deliberately and with impunity. His delegation extended its condolences to the families of the 72 UNRWA staff members who had been killed. It commended the work of UNRWA staff in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

18. Israel had been, and remained, the sole cause of the distress of the Palestinian people, having expelled them from their homes under the threat of death and terror. Israel had not been content to merely turn them into refugees for decades but had even pursued them at their places of refuge. After hampering the Agency's work for years, Israel was now directly targeting it in the Gaza Strip to prevent it from providing aid to Palestinians. The Palestinian refugee question was more a political, legal and moral responsibility of the international community than a humanitarian responsibility. Over 5 million Palestinians had been systematically expelled from their homeland of Palestine by the Israeli occupation. UNRWA, having borne witness to the tragedy of the Palestinian people since 1949, remained indispensable in alleviating their suffering.

19. Syria hosted Palestinian refugees on its territory, providing them with support and services, treating them the same way it did its citizens, and would continue to do so until they were able to return to their homeland in accordance with United Nations resolutions. Syria had

also facilitated the provision by UNRWA of services of various categories to Palestinians. It would spare no effort in protecting Palestine refugees present on its territory and helping them secure a decent life. Palestine refugees in Syria had come under attack from armed terrorist groups and, like the Syrian people, were now suffering under the illegal and unethical unilateral coercive economic measures imposed by the United States of America and the European Union, measures that were systematically aimed at denying them their most basic needs.

20. In order to be able to continue to perform its duties and provide services to all Palestinian refugees, UNRWA must receive adequate and sustainable funding. Her Government categorically rejected the discontinuation of its education, health care, relief and social services, which would be a violation of international law and resolutions, and any transfer of UNRWA services to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or any other organization or agency. The United Nations must take immediate steps to close the gap in the UNRWA budget, including working with donor countries to secure adequate and sustained funding, pending a just solution to the question of Palestine in accordance with the relevant resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which provided that refugees had a right to return to their homes or receive compensation.

21. In the statement delivered by the Director of the UNRWA Representative Office on behalf of the Commissioner-General (see [A/C.4/78/SR.22](#), para. 9), it was stated that Palestine refugees had endured a civil war. That term should be avoided, as it distorted the situation in Syria. The country had not faced a civil war, but rather terrorism backed by certain well-known States – those very States that were now imposing unilateral coercive measures on Syrians and Palestinians in the country.

22. **Ms. Al-mashehari** (Yemen) said that her delegation condemned in the strongest possible terms the ongoing brutal Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip, in which thousands had been killed or injured. The international community must take effective action to curb that unprecedented challenge to international law. The denial of water, electricity, food and medicine to the civilian population contravened international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and amounted to a war crime and a crime against humanity. The repercussions of those actions would derail the peace process in the Middle East, unleash a wave of violence and anger across the region, and provide terrorist and extremist groups with more pretexts to spread destruction across the region and the world. An

immediate ceasefire must be reached, and protection must be extended to civilians, hospitals, places of worship, medical facilities and schools. Humanitarian assistance must be allowed into the Gaza Strip without hindrance; the recent delivery through the Rafah crossing was not enough to meet the basic needs of the affected population. Her delegation rejected any attempt or threat to forcibly displace Palestinians from their homeland.

23. The Agency's mandate could not be undermined or transferred to another entity. UNRWA must continue to provide services to Palestine refugees within and outside refugee camps in all five fields of operation, including occupied Jerusalem, until the question of Palestine refugees was resolved justly, in line with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Her Government condemned the systematic attempts by Israel to shut down all UNRWA institutions in occupied Jerusalem and replace them with Israeli occupation institutions. The international community should guarantee the necessary financial resources to remedy the Agency's budgetary shortfall and enable it to continue performing its vital humanitarian role.

24. **Mr. Romero Puentes** (Cuba) said that nothing could justify the serious violations of international humanitarian law that were being committed against Gaza. Israel was violating all relevant United Nations resolutions and its obligations as an occupying Power under the fourth Geneva Convention with the full confidence that it would be able to continue to evade responsibility due to the deadlock in the Security Council. The killings of UNRWA staff members in the Gaza Strip were an attack on the United Nations and its founding principles. The Palestinian people were living through a nightmare, and the images of the Holocaust perpetrated by Israel were devastating.

25. The available humanitarian assistance was not enough to cover the basic needs of the affected population in Gaza. Lack of fuel, constant bombardment, communications blackouts and the destruction of infrastructure had made it even more difficult for UNRWA to conduct its work, which was needed more than ever. The worsening conditions on the ground, the inability to reach a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict due to the reckless and disrespectful stance of Israel and the lack of sufficient funds for UNRWA programmes pointed to a bleak future for the millions of Palestine refugees in the Agency's areas of operation. Member States should show political will to guarantee sufficient, predictable and sustainable financing for UNRWA so it could continue its vital work. Cuba welcomed the strategy of UNRWA to expand its donor base, increase digital fundraising and

seek innovative funding measures to guarantee access to services for all Palestine refugees.

26. To reach a just and lasting solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Palestinian people must be able to exercise self-determination and build an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Palestine refugees' right of return must also be upheld.

27. **Ms. Jerbouï** (Morocco) said that the staff of UNRWA had performed commendably under difficult circumstances, and must be protected and given adequate resources. Her Government was deeply concerned at the Israeli military escalation in the Gaza Strip, which was inconsistent with international humanitarian law and shared human values. There was a risk that the conflict could spread across the Occupied Palestinian Territory and into neighbouring States, endangering international security and stability. There was a pressing need for de-escalation leading to a ceasefire, the opening of humanitarian corridors and the release of detainees. All civilians must be protected in accordance with international law, and any endeavour to displace Palestinians from their homeland or undermine the national security of neighbouring States must be rejected. Through the Bayt Mal al-Quds al-Sharif Agency, her Government had sent emergency humanitarian and medical assistance to the Palestinian people. It remained convinced that the only way to guarantee peace and security in the region was to establish an independent Palestinian State on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel.

28. **Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) said that the comprehensive blockade of Gaza had cut off essential supplies, rendering UNRWA relief efforts unsustainable. Israel should lift the blockade, revoke the emergency evacuation order, restore the supply of water, electricity, food and fuel in Gaza, stop its collective punishment against the people of Gaza and create conditions for the full and effective operation of Rafah crossing. The recent efforts by Egypt, other countries in the region and the Secretary-General to open humanitarian relief passages were a welcome development. China, for its part, had provided emergency humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, such aid would fall far short of what was needed unless a ceasefire was achieved. If left unchecked, the war could engulf the entire region.

29. The protracted question of Palestine refugees resulted from a failure to implement the two-State solution and guarantee the refugees' fundamental rights. An independent and fully sovereign State of Palestine should be established based on the borders of 4 June

1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. An international peace conference should be convened as soon as possible to define specific steps towards implementing that solution. China would continue to work with the international community to bring an end to the war in Gaza, ease the humanitarian crisis and achieve long-term stability in the Middle East.

30. **Mr. Nishiyama** (Japan) said that his country was deeply concerned about recent developments in Gaza, particularly the air strikes on the Jabalia refugee camp that had resulted in hundreds of casualties. Further losses of innocent lives were unacceptable. Japan fully supported immediate humanitarian pauses and the establishment of humanitarian corridors to ensure that basic assistance could be provided without delay. As a steadfast partner of UNRWA since 1953, Japan was prepared to provide \$65 million in aid and relief supplies for Palestine through the Japan International Cooperation Agency, in addition to the previously announced \$10 million in aid through an emergency grant to international organizations, including UNRWA.

31. **Mr. Kanu** (Sierra Leone) said that, since the condemnable attacks carried out by Hamas against Israeli civilians on 7 October 2023, Israel had indiscriminately bombarded the Gaza Strip. As a result, UNRWA had been unable to provide adequate humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza amid a deteriorating humanitarian situation. There was therefore a need for a humanitarian ceasefire and the establishment of humanitarian corridors to ensure that United Nations agencies and implementing partners would have immediate, safe and unimpeded access to deliver aid to civilians. UNRWA had made commendable efforts to adapt to changing circumstances and fulfil its mandate, and should be provided with sufficient, predictable and sustained financial and other support until a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees was found. The relevant parties should work towards a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders.

32. **Mr. Nguyen** Hoang Nguyen (Viet Nam) said that hostilities, heightened tensions and violence had exacerbated the already dire situation in the densely populated Gaza Strip and other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Since 7 October, the world had been witnessing an unprecedented, human-caused humanitarian crisis without being able to do much to stop the violence. Viet Nam had repeatedly condemned all indiscriminate attacks on civilians and critical civilian infrastructure, which must be protected under international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. All parties should refrain from the use of

force and make every effort to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

33. UNRWA was an essential provider of vital services to millions of Palestine refugees and was key to regional stability. The lives and wellbeing of UNRWA staff and all humanitarian workers operating under the United Nations flag must be protected. All donors should step up efforts to provide UNRWA with the resources needed to address the dire situation in Gaza. Providing essential services to refugees should not, however, be an alternative to finding a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict. Viet Nam supported the establishment of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, with secure and internationally recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines and in accordance with international law, the Charter and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

34. **Mr. Van Schalkwyk** (South Africa) said that South Africa was deeply troubled by the loss of lives of UNRWA personnel during the current military assault and bombardment of Gaza by Israel. It was shocking that a Member State of the United Nations was committing such acts against United Nations personnel and infrastructure. The UNRWA staff members were not combatants or collaborators, as the representative of Israel had suggested, but rather humanitarians who were killed while selflessly helping civilians subjected to unwarranted attacks and collective punishment. The parties engaged in the conflict should respect international humanitarian law, which prohibited the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure.

35. An immediate and sustained humanitarian truce in Gaza was needed to address the deteriorating humanitarian conditions. The work of UNRWA remained of critical importance, as the Agency had to deliver essential services with limited assistance and no additional space to accommodate the growing number of internally displaced persons. Urgent fuel deliveries were required to ensure that the Agency could provide essential health services. In the light of its dire financial situation, Member States should increase their funding for the Agency. For its part, South Africa had recently made a financial contribution within its limited means. Peace in the Middle East could be achieved only through a negotiated and just two-State solution.

36. **Ms. González López** (El Salvador) said that, as indicated in the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/78/13), the situation for millions of Palestine refugees in the region had been deteriorating prior to the recent escalation of violence. UNRWA staff continued to deliver essential services to refugees and had spared no effort to safeguard the civilian population

in Gaza and the West Bank; however, it would soon lose its capacity to do so in the absence of decisive action by the United Nations. The parties in the conflict must fully comply with all obligations under international law, particularly with regard to the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel and civil and humanitarian infrastructure. El Salvador called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and the establishment of humanitarian corridors to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

37. The financial resources requested by the Secretary-General for UNRWA should be approved in their entirety, and budget requirements should be updated to reflect the needs that had arisen from the damage and losses reported in recent weeks. El Salvador shared the concerns of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA regarding the possible destabilizing impact that a lack of funding for UNRWA could have on the region.

38. The chronic underfunding of UNRWA could be attributed in part to the political stalemate in the pursuit of a just and lasting solution to the conflict. The United Nations had a collective responsibility to the Palestine refugees in keeping with the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The international community must take tangible steps towards, restarting a political process leading to peace in the region.

39. **Mr. Pérez Ayestarán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations, said that the right of return of the Palestine refugees must be upheld, without further delays. Until a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine was found, efforts by UNRWA had a tangible impact on the daily lives of the 5.9 million registered refugees in its areas of operation. Regrettably, the number of UNRWA staff members killed in the latest conflict continued to rise, as an additional 17 staff members had been killed in the previous three days. The Group condemned all attacks on UNRWA facilities, which were sheltering more than one-fourth of the entire population of Gaza. Efforts must be made to ensure that the parties respected international humanitarian law, including the principles of proportionality and distinction and the safety and security of all civilians and humanitarian and medical personnel in line with General Assembly resolution [ES-10/21](#). Member States with the means should consider increasing their financial contributions to UNRWA to ensure that the Agency could continue to provide vital services to all those in need.

40. Given the scale of the ongoing atrocities, humanitarian needs on the ground were growing by the

minute. UNRWA must be allowed to operate safely and effectively alongside other humanitarian actors. Despite ongoing efforts, the humanitarian assistance entering the Gaza Strip remained insufficient to cover the basic needs of the affected population. The international community must not turn a blind eye to the tragedy; it must reaffirm its unwavering political support for UNRWA and renew the call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and unimpeded humanitarian access to prevent a total collapse of critical infrastructure, which would lead to more civilian casualties and widespread hunger, disease and poverty.

41. **Mr. Alamri** (Saudi Arabia) said that his delegation condemned in the strongest terms the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip, including the use of prohibited weapons and the killing of innocent civilians. Bombardments on an almost daily basis had displaced 1.3 million Gazans, who had sought refuge in mosques, churches, hospitals and schools, including UNRWA premises. The latter had also been deliberately targeted, in a flagrant breach of international humanitarian law. If those violations persisted, they would have serious repercussions for regional and international peace and security. A ceasefire must be established; all Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip must come to a stop; immediate access must be granted for the delivery of humanitarian and medical assistance; and obstacles to the Agency's work must be removed. Saudi Arabia condemned any attempt to settle the question of Palestine by displacing the Palestinian people within the Occupied Palestinian Territory or to neighbouring States.

42. The question of Palestine was the pivotal issue for Arabs and Muslims, and was at the forefront of the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia. His country had spared no effort to support the Palestinian people in their endeavour to establish an independent, sovereign State of Palestine on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, which provided a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. All obstacles to the right of return of Palestine refugees should be removed.

43. Saudi Arabia had contributed some \$1 billion to the Agency since 2000 and had made its annual contribution of \$2 million on 15 October 2023. A King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre fundraising appeal for the Palestinian people had raised \$100 million to date. Donors should increase their contributions in view of the Agency's growing burden, and efforts should be made to fund UNRWA from the general budget.

44. **Ms. Squeff** (Argentina) said that UNRWA was the main humanitarian actor in the Gaza Strip and needed sustained support. Her country condemned in unequivocal terms the terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas on 7 October and recognized the right of Israel to self-defence. Nevertheless, there was no justification for the violation of international humanitarian law or the failure to uphold the obligation to protect civilians in armed conflict without distinction. Her delegation was concerned about the increase in violence in the West Bank, in particular as a result of attacks carried out by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians. It condemned all attacks since 7 October on schools, hospitals and United Nations facilities, including the attack carried out by the Israel Defense Forces against the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza. Attacks on civilian infrastructure, especially on hospitals, desalination plants and refugee camps, should stop immediately.

45. There was an urgent need for humanitarian assistance to reach the Palestinian population, and for the easing of entry restrictions at the Rafah crossing. The Argentine International Cooperation and Humanitarian Agency/White Helmets Commission was organizing a humanitarian mission that would depart for Egypt in the coming days with medicine, hospital supplies, water purification tablets and other essential supplies.

46. Argentina continued to support the call for an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce, leading to a cessation of hostilities. Hamas should free all hostages without condition and without delay. A just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question could not be imposed through the use of military force or terrorist acts; it required a peaceful and comprehensive solution on the basis of two States living side by side in peace and security, within safe and internationally recognized borders.

47. **Mr. Garrido Melo** (Chile) said that the use of force by a State in legitimate self-defence should be guided by the principles of proportionality, distinction and precaution. That had clearly not been the case, as public infrastructure, homes, and educational and health centres, including UNRWA facilities, had all been bombed. Moreover, the blockade of Gaza by Israel had prevented the entry of sufficient amounts of food, water, medical and fuel supplies, and the order to evacuate the northern part of the Gaza Strip constituted forced displacement of the population.

48. Chile unequivocally condemned the actions of Hamas, as well as all terrorist acts and acts of violence against civilians. It called for the unconditional release

of all hostages while ensuring their well-being and treatment in accordance with international law. Actions that violated the provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law should be investigated by competent international entities to determine the ultimate responsibility of those involved and hold them to account.

49. An immediate ceasefire must be established, and Israel must end its blockade and allow humanitarian access. The Government of Chile was contributing such assistance through UNRWA from the Chilean Fund Against Hunger and Poverty. Mechanisms for international dialogue should be improved in order to prevent an escalation of violence in the region. Chile had consistently supported the recognition of two States living in harmony within secure and internationally recognized borders, and with full respect for the human rights of all its inhabitants.

50. **Mr. Kedar** (Israel) said that his delegation had previously raised concerns about the mandate of UNRWA and the many flaws and irregularities in the Agency's activities. Following the barbaric terrorist attack on southern Israel on 7 October by Hamas, in which around 1,400 Israelis and foreign nationals had been brutally murdered and 240 people, including the elderly, women, children and even babies, had been taken hostage, those concerns had been superseded by a much larger issue, namely, the exploitation by terrorist organizations in Gaza of humanitarian and other forms of aid to the Palestinians, including aid donated to UNRWA. Such exploitation had been extensive, routine and well documented but, unfortunately, had not been a focus of attention in the United Nations in general and in the Committee in particular.

51. Over the years, the international community, including the United Nations system, had allowed ever-increasing volumes of humanitarian and economic aid for Palestinians in Gaza, despite the concerns of Israel that such aid would be used by terrorist organizations to fund the smuggling of weapons and explosives and to carry out terrorist attacks against Israel. Hamas and Islamic Jihad had exploited every single element of humanitarian and economic aid to Gaza, without which Hamas would have been less able to carry out its attack on Israel, and fewer Israelis – Jews, Druze, Christians and Muslims alike – and foreign citizens, including foreign workers and students of agriculture, would have been slaughtered and taken hostage on 7 October.

52. The international community had regularly called for the entry into Gaza of concrete, cement, steel and other building materials, while giving assurances that they would be used for civilians only, and that

guarantees would be put in place. In practice, however, significant amounts of those materials had been stolen by Hamas and used to build hundreds of kilometres of military tunnels throughout Gaza, including under hospitals, schools, mosques and other civilian facilities, and to build factories that manufactured and stored rockets and munitions. On a daily basis, massive quantities of fuel delivered to Gaza and intended for hospitals, water desalination and other important civilian uses had been stolen. On 13 October, despite having hundreds of thousands of litres of fuel in its possession, Hamas had stolen fuel from an UNRWA compound in Gaza City, as communicated by UNRWA in a message on the social messaging service X (formerly known as Twitter) that had been deleted soon afterwards. In recent days, Hamas had also stolen fuel from the Indonesian hospital in Bayt Lahya. Hamas needed that fuel to enable the continued functioning of its underground military tunnels, which required ventilation and lighting, and its continued production and firing of rockets, over 9,000 of which had been launched against Israel since 7 October.

53. In response to requests from the international community, Israel had allowed the entry into Gaza of water infrastructure equipment, but many of the water pipes had been dug up and used as parts for rockets by Hamas. Israel had allowed fertilizers into Gaza, even though they were dual-use items, to improve the agricultural sector. Not surprisingly, a significant amount of it had been stolen by Hamas and used to manufacture explosives. The international community constantly implored Israel to allow Gazans to work in Israel. However, when Hamas terrorists had invaded Israel and carried out atrocities and war crimes, they had had in their possession maps of the towns and villages they attacked, including detailed information provided by Palestinian workers from Gaza who had been allowed to work in Israel. Hamas had even been known to exploit the movement of sick Gazans being treated in Israeli hospitals, including by using cancer patients to smuggle explosives.

54. Lastly, hundreds of millions of dollars had been donated by the international community to UNRWA for its hundreds of schools, yet its textbooks promoted hatred and incited the murder of Jews. In addition, according to a newly published report by the independent Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education, numerous UNRWA teachers had celebrated the 7 October massacre on social media, including by posting on social media videos of attacks by Hamas. In one text book, the Palestinian terrorist Dalal Mughrabi was hailed as a hero; in another, reading comprehension was taught

through a story in which Palestinians wore explosive belts and cut the necks of enemy soldiers; in another, pupils were taught that Zionists controlled money, the media and politics and that Jews were treacherous.

55. At the conclusion of current conflict, Israel would do everything necessary to ensure that no future aid for Palestinians in Gaza was siphoned off for illegitimate uses. His delegation trusted that the international community, including UNRWA, would take that into account when engaging Israeli authorities on that issue in the future.

56. **Ms. Zalabata Torres** (Colombia) said that her country deplored the appalling escalation of violence and the continued violations of international humanitarian law, such as attacks on the civilian population. Having experienced decades of armed conflict and multiple attempts at peace, Colombia understood that it was essential to renounce violence in order for societies to transition to a state of peaceful coexistence. Polarization and violence produced only more death, violence and destruction, leaving behind a grim legacy for future generations.

57. Colombia was concerned about the precarious situation of UNRWA in the wake of attacks on its infrastructure and as a result of its serious financial situation. The international community must act urgently to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid and protect lives. Colombia had sent humanitarian aid to Gaza and hoped to continue doing so to the best of its ability.

58. Colombia supported the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent, viable and internationally recognized State, and the right of Israel to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

59. *Mr. Woszczek (Poland), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

60. **Mr. Sahraoui** (Algeria) said that his delegation extended its condolences to the families of the UNRWA staff members who had been killed. Humanitarian workers were protected under international humanitarian law. Targeting them was a crime against humanity, and the perpetrators must be brought to justice. The occupation authorities had been able to act with impunity, encroaching on Christian and Muslim holy sites and disregarding the rights of the Palestinian people. That was the main reason why the situation was currently deteriorating. The United Nations must put a stop to the barbaric attacks carried out by Israel and ensure that the Palestinian people could exercise their

inalienable rights, particularly the right to self-determination.

61. UNRWA had been established on a temporary basis, pending a solution to the question of Palestine, but it had now existed for 75 years. Absent any prospect of such a solution, it was the only lifeline for the Palestinian people. The Agency's mandate must not be politicized, and action should be taken to ensure that a greater proportion of its funding came from the general budget of the United Nations.

62. The ongoing collective punishment of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip underscored the vital role of UNRWA, which was the main body coordinating aid on the ground. The occupation authorities never missed an opportunity to criticize it, in a desperate and shabby attempt to undermine its credibility. For the same reason, they were currently targeting its schools.

63. Algeria had recently announced a \$30 million aid package for the refugee camp of Jenin, which had been raided and extensively damaged by the occupation forces. All parties had a moral and political responsibility to bring an end to the acts of aggression, establish an immediate and permanent ceasefire, deliver essential aid to the Gaza Strip, resist any endeavour to forcibly displace the Palestinian people, and work towards a lasting solution to the question of Palestine, including the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution for Palestine refugees.

64. **Mr. Gibbon** (United Kingdom) said that UNRWA continued to play an integral role in addressing the mounting humanitarian needs of civilians in Gaza. A collective effort was needed to ensure that aid entered Gaza as quickly as possible and at the required scale, and that it was securely distributed. The United Kingdom would support humanitarian pauses that helped aid to enter Gaza and, crucially, that allowed hostages and international citizens to leave. The United Nations also needed full support so that it could rotate staff out of Gaza in order to maintain their resilience and mental health.

65. Since the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel on 7 October, the United Kingdom had committed more than \$36 million in additional humanitarian aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It was vital for the international community to support the Flash Appeal for the 1.5 million displaced Gazans in urgent need of assistance. UNRWA was an essential component of the Middle East peace process. Its work remained vitally important to protecting the future prospects of Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the wider region, and should not be undermined.

66. **Mr. Lu** (United States of America) said that there was simply no substitute for the critical role played by the United Nations, and especially UNRWA, in Gaza. For years, the Agency's schools, clinics and relief efforts had served as the only alternative to Hamas. All United Nations and humanitarian personnel must be protected, along with all civilians, whether they were Israelis or Palestinians. There was no hierarchy when it came to protecting civilian lives.

67. The United States was the single largest donor to UNRWA, having contributed more than \$1 billion to the Agency since 2021. It had also recently announced an additional \$100 million in humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank. Nonetheless, UNRWA needed additional support from more donors.

68. The United States continued to work with Israel, Egypt, the United Nations and other partners to facilitate the rapid and sustained flow of assistance. While the number of trucks entering Gaza continued to increase, it was not nearly enough and needed to be scaled up urgently. The United States supported humanitarian pauses to allow for the departure of hostages, the distribution of humanitarian aid and the safe passage of civilians.

69. Notwithstanding its strong support for UNRWA, the United States continued to have serious concerns about the slate of resolutions proposed every year in the Committee. Final status issues should be determined through negotiations between the parties and not via the General Assembly.

70. **Mr. Jardali** (Lebanon) said that his delegation condemned in the strongest terms the criminal Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip, which had killed numerous civilians and caused extensive destruction. The international community must prevail on Israel to comply with international humanitarian law and put a stop to its crimes in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The daily acts of destruction could not be justified or dismissed as collateral damage. A ceasefire must be put in place; adequate and sustained humanitarian assistance must be delivered without hindrance; and the planned forced displacement of Palestinians, which was reminiscent of the Nakbah, must be stopped.

71. UNRWA was struggling to deliver assistance, and was now itself a target of the frenzied onslaught of Israel. His delegation urged all Member States to contribute to the Flash Appeal and the programme budget of UNRWA. The chronic shortfall in the Agency's finances needed to be bridged; the current situation was unsustainable and threatened to undermine the stability of host States.

72. His delegation therefore welcomed the support of donor countries and called upon the international community to fulfil and increase financial pledges to the Agency's budget for 2023 and beyond in a sustainable and predictable manner. The international community had a collective responsibility to balance the Agency's budget; it was, quite simply, a matter of life or death. His delegation welcomed the decision of numerous States to make additional contributions to UNRWA. In the interest of regional stability, all peace-loving countries should secure sustained, predictable funding for the Agency by making regular, multi-year contributions and supporting proposals to cover the operational costs of UNRWA from the Organization's regular budget. It was vital for the international community to protect the Agency's mandate, fulfil its political obligation to UNRWA and confront the political attacks against it. The Committee had just heard such an attack, in which a delegate had sought by every means to smear the Agency in order to justify the indiscriminate war that was being waged against civilians.

73. Since 1949, the Agency had provided a social safety net for successive generations of Palestine refugees and helped to preserve the right of return, pending a political solution to the question of Palestine. Such a solution should bring about a just and comprehensive peace, the end of the occupation and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It should include a just solution to the question of Palestine refugees in accordance with internationally recognized resolutions, particularly General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and the Arab Peace Initiative.

74. **Mr. Chumakov** (Russian Federation) said that his country would continue to support the critical humanitarian activities of UNRWA. In recent weeks, it had delivered 27 tons of food and 28 tons of medical and other supplies to the Egyptian Red Crescent for transport into Gaza. In view of the current hostilities, UNRWA played a central role in providing assistance to Palestinians in both the Occupied Palestinian Territory and neighbouring countries, pending just resolution of their status in the context of a settlement of the Palestinian question. For 75 years, it had in essence been the sole international structure in the United Nations that was doing so. Despite external pressure, UNRWA had taken a balanced and unbiased approach and avoided the politicization of its activities.

75. The Russian Federation consistently advocated in the administrative and budgetary organs of the General Assembly for the Agency's activities to be adequately

funded. UNRWA needed to be able to continue its work without delegating its functions to other humanitarian entities. All States should set aside politics and consider supporting UNRWA to ensure the stability of its operations, and increase their annual voluntary contributions to its budget. A greater proportion of the Agency's funding should come from the United Nations regular budget. For its part, the Russian Federation would continue to provide assistance through annual voluntary contributions to the UNRWA budget, which would amount to \$10 million through 2026.

76. **Mr. Alnahyan** (United Arab Emirates) said that it was vital to secure an immediate ceasefire and ensure that civilians in Gaza were fully protected. His delegation commended the staff of UNRWA, who were facing unprecedented challenges. It extended its condolences to the families of those who had lost their lives, and to the Palestinian people as a whole. It deplored the recent attacks on residential areas, civilian infrastructure and UNRWA facilities including, most recently, the bombardment of the Maghazi camp. The situation was catastrophic. More than two million people were under siege and were being denied access to water, electricity, fuel, food or medical assistance. Intermittent media blackouts made it difficult to communicate with the outside world or coordinate with emergency services. Children had been especially affected; medical teams now frequently used the phrase "wounded child, no surviving family". It was essential to provide full, immediate, safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access in the Gaza Strip.

77. The finances of UNRWA must be strengthened so that it could fulfil its mandate in its five areas of operation. For its part, the United Arab Emirates had contributed \$20 million to UNRWA since the start of the current conflict, in addition to its contribution of \$35 million for 2023. It had launched an initiative to treat children from the Gaza Strip in hospitals in the United Arab Emirates, and had established a humanitarian air bridge that had delivered 200 tons of assistance to Egypt, in preparation for its transfer to the Gaza Strip. For that purpose, UNRWA and other actors must be allowed to move safely in order to deliver aid.

78. The United Arab Emirates steadfastly supported the Palestinian people in their endeavour to exercise their legitimate rights, including the establishment of an independent State of Palestine on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution for Palestine refugees including the right of return.

79. **Mr. Novicio** (Philippines) said that, in the face of mounting civilian casualties, the Philippines reaffirmed

its unwavering commitment to international humanitarian law and implored all those involved in the current conflict to safeguard human dignity. The wanton destruction of health and medical facilities was intolerable. It was the duty of the global community to aid those in dire need and to restore peace. His delegation welcomed the opening of a humanitarian corridor with Egypt. The opening of the Rafah crossing had been a lifeline for injured civilians and foreign nationals, including Filipino nationals, who had been caught in the strife. His delegation commended the Agency's unrelenting commitment to the Palestinian people in Gaza, whether they were refugees or not.

80. The voluntary financial contribution of the Philippines to the UNRWA programme budget for 2023 was a testament to the country's enduring support. It was imperative to bolster UNRWA and secure the future of its vital initiatives.

81. **Archbishop Caccia** (Observer for the Holy See) said that the Holy See condemned the terrorist attack carried out on 7 October by Hamas and other armed groups against the Israeli population and appealed for the immediate release of hostages being held in Gaza. At the same time, the Holy See was concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian situation there, which had resulted in the loss of thousands of innocent Palestinian lives, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, and the indiscriminate suffering of the population. Each and every civilian must be protected. All parties must avoid targeting hospitals and medical facilities, refugee camps, schools, and places of worship and their premises. Humanitarian corridors should be kept open to allow aid to reach the entire population. The Holy See was concerned at the growing gap between the essential services provided by UNRWA and the funds available through voluntary contributions, which were the main source of its budget.

82. The only lasting response to the plight of Palestine refugees was a just peace based on a two-State solution, a cessation of current hostilities and the de-escalation of tensions, including at the regional level. It was important for the legitimate authorities of the State of Palestine and the authorities of the State of Israel, with the support of the entire international community, to renew their commitment to peace.

83. **Ms. Elardja Flitti** (Observer for the League of Arab States) said that UNRWA needed greater support in all five areas of operation. With its schools and hospitals, UNRWA was an important part of the consistent international consensus in favour of a two-State solution, notwithstanding the desperate attempts made by Israel to obfuscate the heart of the

matter, namely the fact that the Palestinian people had been forcibly displaced from its land and replaced with a settler population. The peace process had stalled. The occupying Power continued to violate international law and impose facts on the ground, in the form of a one-State solution. The Security Council was paralysed and remained silent. In contrast, the General Assembly had called clearly for a ceasefire and the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and had denounced any endeavour to forcibly displace the Palestinian people.

84. Relief agencies were now warning of crimes against humanity and an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The burden of addressing that situation fell on UNRWA, several dozen of whose staff had been killed. The League of Arab States remained committed to the Arab Peace Initiative and supported the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to resist the occupation and struggle for independence through all the means permissible under international law. It remained convinced of the pivotal role of UNRWA as one of the oldest and most prominent humanitarian organizations in the region. Accordingly, the League called for an immediate ceasefire to be declared and for Israel to end its war. Israel must desist from its settlement activities and its repeated infringements of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, particularly the forced displacement of Palestinians within and beyond their territory. Action should be taken, in cooperation with United Nations entities and international humanitarian relief agencies, to open humanitarian corridors and ensure that women, children, journalists and humanitarian workers were not targeted.

85. The international community should strengthen the Agency's capacities, give it appropriate financial and logistical support, and avoid politicizing its mandate. The international community should intensify its efforts to uphold international law and implement the resolutions of the United Nations, particularly those pertaining to the protection of civilians, medical staff, humanitarian workers and journalists. A mechanism should be put in place to protect the Palestinian people from the Israeli occupation forces, prevent their forced displacement, uphold their dignity and ensure that their basic needs were met. A just solution should be found to the question of Palestine, including the establishment of a fully-fledged, contiguous Palestinian State with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.