# Switzerland to maintain assistance for Palestinian refugees in 2017-2020 period

**Bern, 21.12.2016 - The Federal Council decided at its meeting of 21 December 2016 to maintain its contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) over the coming four year period. The funding provided by Switzerland is primarily intended to help improve the access of the affected population to education, healthcare and social services. In this way Switzerland helps to improve prospects for the future, to reduce the risk of radicalisation among young Palestinians, and to support greater stability in the region. The funds also provide UNRWA with greater security in its budget planning.**

Through its contribution to UNRWA Switzerland seeks to support the relief agency's efforts to continue performing its important mandate under the current difficult conditions. Switzerland's annual UNRWA contribution will be maintained at its present level of approximately CHF 20 million per year. Switzerland's support is primarily intended to help fund UNRWA programmes that improve the access of Palestinian refugees to education, healthcare and social services.

The current instability in the Middle East poses a major challenge for UNRWA. The outbreak of the conflict in Syria in March 2011 has had particularly dramatic consequences for Palestinian refugees both in Syria and in neighbouring countries. 95% of the Palestinian refugees still living in Syria are dependent on the humanitarian aid provided by UNRWA. The agency has continued to perform its activities despite the ongoing armed conflict and has provided more than 460,000 individuals with emergency relief since the conflict began.

More than half of the UNRWA budget is spent on education. The agency's 685 schools are currently attended by over a half a million children. In this way UNRWA helps to improve their prospects for the future and to reduce the risk of radicalisation among young Palestinians. Graduates of the certified vocational training programmes offered by UNRWA acquire professional skills highly in demand on the regional labour market. UNRWA also runs 137 health centres in the region where some three million Palestinian refugees can receive high-quality health services. In addition, the relief agency supplies approximately 300,000 Palestinian refugees with assistance in the form of food or cash allowances.

Since its establishment in 1949, UNRWA has been one of Switzerland's main multilateral partners in the Middle East. Switzerland actively participates in shaping the agency's policies and working methods. Since 2005, Switzerland has been a member of the UNRWA Advisory Commission, whose mission is to support the agency's General Commissioner in the performance of his mandate. In July 2016, Switzerland assumed the chairmanship of the Advisory Commission for a one-year term. Switzerland supports the process currently under way to bring about a structural reform of UNRWA in order to ensure the relief agency's continued ability to perform its mandate and contribute to stability in the region. Pierre Krähenbühl, UNRWA General Commissioner since 2014, is Switzerland's highest ranking official at the United Nations.

---

**Address for enquiries**

FDFA Information
Tel. +41 58 462 31 53
info@eda.admin.ch