Funded by the Government of Japan, UNDP kicks off Tokyo Football League in Gaza

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UNDP Representative, Roberto Valent, adding his signature on the football before the kick off

Gaza, 14 March 2016 – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the Palestine Football Association, kicked off the Tokyo Football League as part of their shared commitment to empowering youth in the Gaza Strip, which is a part of the "Support to Youth and the Sports Sector in the Gaza Strip" project funded by the Government of Japan for the amount of USD 153,430. The project was a commitment made by the Prime Minister of Japan, H.E. Shinzo Abe, when President Mahmoud Abbas visited Japan and met him last month.

The project aims at encouraging youth in Gaza where many people have been affected physically and mentally by the continuous military conflicts and even lost their hopes for the future due to the long-standing siege. No other time is more urgent than now to alleviate considerable stress and frustration among youth through their participation in the wider range of sports activities, thereby engage and connect them with the society.

Takeshi Okubo, Ambassador for Palestinian Affairs and Representative of Japan to the Palestinian Authority, said: “Through organizing Tokyo Football League, we hope that Japan will be the strong boosters for the Palestinian youth in an effort to revive their hopes and to reconstruct Gaza. We firmly believe that the children in Gaza, as Japanese children did and are still working after the Great Earthquake and Tsunami hit Japan 5 years ago, can develop the spirit of never-give-up for realizing their own dreams and aspirations. Japan will continue to stand by them.”

Mr Roberto Valent, UNDP Special Representative of the Administrator thanked the Government of Japan for their continuous support and highlighted that this projects comes as part of UNDP’s response to youth needs in the Gaza Strip. “It is important to create venues for meaningful engagement for Palestinian youth, especially in Gaza. Sports is not only a healthy way for youth to release their frustrations, but is also a tool to build tolerance and social cohesion,” he added.

The Tokyo League is organized by the Palestine Football Association for youth under the age of 19. The league includes 56 teams, from different refugee camps and various towns and cities, in the Gaza Strip. The project includes two additional activities, namely, volleyball and table tennis tournaments for girls. These will be implemented in cooperation with the Palestinian Olympic Committee and UNRWA, where the participants will be females from UNRWA and Governmental preparatory schools.

The official ceremony for celebrating this project will be organized later and the date will be announced soon.

It is worth noting that the Government of Japan is considered one of UNDP’s largest partners. Over the years, the Government of Japan has provided more than USD 344 million since 1993 for project implementation in the areas of infrastructure, rubble removal, health, education, agriculture, access to justice, and others.

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