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PRESS RELEASE

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Education stakeholders in Palestine gather at the Education Sector Working Group in Ramallah

Ramallah – On 12 December 2016 the last Education Sector Working Group of 2016 took place at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE). The Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) is chaired by the Minister of Education and Higher Education and co-chaired by Belgium, with the technical advise by UNESCO, gathers the main education stakeholders in Palestine, including national and international civil society, development partners and senior policy makers from the MoEHE, takes place every three months to discuss developments and challenges within the education sector in Palestine.

At the meeting, it was announced that the role of the co-chair of the ESWG, which is currently fulfilled by the Belgium, will be taken over by Finland, as part of a bi-annual rotation among the Joint Financing Partners.

His Excellency, the **Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr. Sabri Saidam**, highlighted the main developments made in the education sector in Palestine in the course of 2016, among which the new focus on technical and vocational education, digitalization, pre-school education and the establishment of a new "Excellence and Rewarding Fund" for teachers excelling in their jobs. The Minister also recalled the forthcoming adoption of the new education law and the further steps towards the

management reform. He also voiced his raising concern about the remaining challenges faced by Education in Palestine, particularly the attacks on Education in East Jerusalem and in the Old City of Hebron.

In his welcoming remarks, the **UNESCO Representative to Palestine, Dr. Lodovico Folin- Calabi**, applauded the launch of the new National Policy Agenda by the Government and the achievements made in the education sector, particularly the introduction of the new Tawjihi system, the digitalization strategy, the integration of technical and vocational education in the general educationand the new impetus on early childhood education, by making pre-education as compulsory. Dr. Folin Calabi said that *"these are big steps taken in a very short duration, which will affect positively the learning outcomes of our children and help bridging the gap between the supply and demand in the Palestinian labour market*." He also reiterated the support by UNESCO, as the lead UN Agency providing technical assistance to Member States in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4, to the further advancement of Education in Palestine.

Ms. Florence Duvieusart, Consul and Head of Development Cooperation at the Consulate General of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the Joint Funding Partners (JFPs) and as co-chair of the Education Sector Working Group, commended the MoEHE on the developments made with the audit, e-learning and the implementation of TVET. Mrs. Duvieusart highlighted that "*2017 will be a crucial year for the Ministry and its partners. We saw many great results, which were achieved under the dynamic leadership of his Excellency."* She then acknowledged the need of the Ministry to target investment in vulnerable areas like East Jerusalem and the need to better coordinate development aid and humanitarian aid and pledged continued support from international partners in these endeavours.

During the meeting, key officials of the MoEHE presented the Education Sector Strategy and the Annual Work Plan and budget, followed by a group discussion with questions and answers. After the group discussion, the official hand-over of the role of co-chair of the ESWG in the presence of the Consul-General of Belgium, Mr. Bruno Jans, and of the Representative of Finland, Ms Pirkko-Liisa Kyöstilä.

For more information on UNESCO's activities in Palestine, please visit www.unesco.org/ramallah

For more information on this event, please contact: Majd Beltaji, Public Information Officer of the UNESCO Ramallah Office, at m.beltaji@unesco.org