PRESS RELEASE

UNRWA and the Lajee Center Inaugurate the First Child-Friendly Spaces in Aida Refugee Camp



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Today, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Lajee Center inaugurated the first ever child-friendly spaces – a football pitch and a playground – in Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem.

The new child-friendly spaces have been made possible with a generous contribution from the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) and will provide the children of Aida camp with a rare opportunity to play and make new friends within a very challenging environment.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl; UNRWA Director of Operations in the West Bank Felipe Sanchez; the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iceland, Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson; Director of the Lajee Center Salah Ajarma; diplomats from various countries and community representatives attended the inauguration.

The Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Pierre Krähenbühl, said: “The football pitch and playground inaugurated today are tremendously important for the well-being of the children of Aida Camp. Together with our Palestinian and international partners, we are committed to continue supporting the children who have endured so much unacceptable pain and suffering.”

The Director of UNRWA Operations in the West Bank, Felipe Sanchez, highlighted the importance of the new child-friendly spaces, saying: “The refugee children of Aida camp are particularly exposed to frequent confrontations, resulting violence and tear gas in the camp. The playground and the football pitch provide a much-needed opportunity for these kids to play, have fun and for a moment forget about the daily challenges they face living under military occupation."

The inauguration event also included a football match between diplomats and children of Aida camp and an exhibition of photographs by Osama Silwadi portraying UNRWA staff’s commitment to the protection of Palestine refugees.

The inauguration comes after several months of increased violence in and around Aida camp, with almost daily confrontations between Israeli security forces and Palestinians. From 1 October 2015 to 11 February 2016, UNRWA has recorded 93 incursions by Israeli forces into Aida camp, and more than 512 Palestine refugees, including 61 minors, have been injured.

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Background information

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA Programme Budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall, projected for 2016 to stand at US$ 81 million. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals.

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA

services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

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