PRESS RELEASE

UNRWA Commissioner-General Concludes Visit to Switzerland



Didier Burkhalter, head of the FDFA, and UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl © FDFA

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Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl, has completed a two day visit to Switzerland during which he held talks with senior officials of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and briefed the External Affairs Committee of the Upper House of the Swiss Parliament on the work of UNRWA in an increasingly volatile Middle East.

Following his meeting with Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter, Mr Krähenbühl said he was “grateful for the opportunity to engage with Switzerland at this level, given the increasingly vital contribution that the Swiss Government and people are making to some five million Palestine refugees through the human development and emergency work of UNRWA.”

During the two day mission, Mr Krähenbühl provided an update on the situation of Palestine refugees in the region, particularly the West Bank, Gaza and Syria, as well as the impact on Lebanon and Jordan of increased refugee flows from Syria. He also highlighted the importance of UNRWA as a stabilizing entity and the potential consequences to the Middle East region, to Switzerland and Europe of UNRWA not being able to fulfil its mandate; such as instability or additional refugee flows.

“No one wants to be a refugee,” he said, “and certainly no one wants to take their families on perilous journeys out of the Middle East unless absolutely necessary. It is important to make sure that well-funded UN humanitarian agencies are able to give people the services they need in the region.”

During his meeting with the head of SDC, Ambassador Manuel Sager, the Commissioner-General also expressed appreciation for Switzerland’s steadfast and strategic support to UNRWA, highlighting the exceptional specific assistance the Swiss Agency for Development Corporation continues to provide for protection, communication and change management initiatives and other key reforms.

In 2015, Switzerland was ranked as UNRWA’s sixth largest donor in terms of contributions to UNWRA’s Programme Budget and 11th largest donor in terms of overall funding. Switzerland’s total financial support to UNWRA reached over US$ 24.7 million in 2015.

– Ends –

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, protection and microfinance .

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