PRESS RELEASE

Half of UNRWA Schools Affected By Conflict in the Last Five Years
UNRWA Showcases its Innovative 'Education in Emergencies' Response



A Palestinian child among the destruction in an UNRWA school in Qabr Essit camp, Syria.
© UNRWA Photo

22 May 2016
Istanbul

Of the many tragedies occurring in the Middle East, the story of embattled schools may be one of the least well known. Front lines shift and run through school

grounds, artillery rounds hit installations, incursions by armed forces or groups occur, and access is prevented or rendered impossible for young boys and girls, for whom education is a critical life-line.

Nearly half of the 692 schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNRWA, across the region have been impacted, attacked or otherwise rendered inoperable by conflict or violence in the last five years, according to a new report unveiled at the World Humanitarian Summit, taking place in Istanbul. “A staggering 302 schools have been directly affected,” said UNRWA’s Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl, in an article published this week.

Speaking at the Istanbul summit where protecting education is a major theme, Mr. Krähenbühl emphasized the courage and determination of UNRWA teachers, specialists and principals, who preserve access to learning for half a million Palestine refugee boys and girls despite these extremely adverse conditions.

“In our innovative ‘Education in Emergencies’ programmes, we deliver classes to tens of thousands of refugee children across the Middle East through ‘UNRWA TV’ broadcasts and interactive distance-learning modules. In Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank, hundreds of specifically trained psychosocial counsellors work with deeply traumatized children to recover and move on with their lives. In many ways, we simply never give up,” he said.

UNRWA’s key message at the summit will be to highlight education as a major investment in dignity, human development and a measure of stability for Palestine refugees, who represent 40 per cent of those in the world's protracted refugee situations. Through education, UNRWA is able to look at young students not just as victims of conflict and injustice, but also actors of their own destiny, determined to make their contribution.

“Development action and emergency aid, expected to be a big theme at the Summit, live side-by-side under one roof in UNRWA,” said Mr Krähenbühl. “Our teachers become shelter managers during times of crisis and later return to being teachers. We offer short-term emergency support and long-term development as part of one, coherent intervention.”

The UNRWA report details “deeply disturbing” attacks on schools in Syria, Gaza, Lebanon and the West Bank and presents testimonies of some of the children affected. Mr. Krähenbühl called on states and non-state parties to “refrain from such attacks, to respect the civilian character of UN installations and to spare the lives of children, civilians and humanitarian workers. For children, education is a passport to dignity and protecting schools against the effects of conflict and

violence will be a key test of the world's ability to deliver on the commitment to 'leave no one behind.'"

"For more than six decades, UNRWA has been an essential part of the world's humanitarian system," said Mr. Krähenbühl. "All too often we have seen first-hand the terrible human cost of conflict. We therefore endorse the Secretary-General's call for a strengthening of political leadership to prevent and end war and human displacement. This includes the conflict between Israel and Palestine in accordance with international law and UN resolutions."

Mr. Krähenbühl concluded that "at the Summit, UNRWA will join initiatives such as the 'Grand Bargain' on humanitarian financing between humanitarian actors and donors in the hope that means can be mobilized to preserve and improve its investment in education for hundreds of thousands of Palestine refugee children. It is their future and their humanity that is at stake and, as the UN Secretary-General's report reminds us, there is but 'One Humanity.'"

– 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 .

For more information, please contact:

Christopher Gunness
UNRWA Spokesperson
Mobile: +972 (0)54 240 2659
Office: +972 (0)2 589 0267
c.gunness@unrwa.org
Twitter: @ChrisGunness

Sami Mshasha
UNRWA Arabic Spokesperson
Mobile: +972 (0)54 216 8295
Office: +972 (0)2 589 0724
s.mshasha@unrwa.org