PRESS RELEASE

UNRWA Commissioner-General Concludes First Official Visit to Sweden



UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl (left) met with the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström (right),
and several other senior officials during his two-day mission to Sweden. *© 2016 UNRWA Photo Courtesy of Emelie Borg*

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East Jerusalem

On Friday, 21 October, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Pierre Krähenbühl, concluded a two-day visit to Stockholm, during which he met with senior government officials, parliamentarians, and researchers to highlight the long-standing partnership between Sweden and UNRWA and raise awareness of the current challenges facing Palestine refugees.

The Commissioner-General held meetings with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström and with the State Secretary to the Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate, Ulrika Modéer. These discussions focused on instability in the Middle East, the importance of improving prospects for Palestine refugee youth and avenues to further expand the remarkable cooperation with Sweden.

Mr. Krähenbühl also met the Assistant Director-General of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA); members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Parliament; and several other senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the visit, Mr. Krähenbühl further met with researchers from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and delivered a lecture on the Agency's humanitarian work at Stockholm University co-organized by the Stockholm Association of International Affairs and the Swedish Institute of International Affairs.

"Sweden is a passionate and highly engaged partner, deeply committed to the dignity and rights of Palestine Refugees and to UNRWA's role and mandate," said the Commissioner-General. "I wish to express my sincere gratitude for the strength of their support and trust. I look forward to working closely with Sweden on new initiatives to further develop the quality of UNRWA's services, notably in health and education."

The Commissioner-General's visit comes after Sweden's recent announcement that they will be contributing an additional SEK 70 million (approximately US$ 8 million) to the UNRWA Programme Budget in 2016, in addition to the SEK 345 million (US$ 40.6 million) they have already contributed this year.

In 2015, Sweden contributed SEK 300 million (nearly US$ 36 million) to the UNRWA Programme Budget, placing them among the top five donors to the Agency's core programmes and services, including education, health care, and relief and social services. In addition, Swedish contributions in 2015 to the Agency's Emergency Appeals for the Syria Regional Crisis and the occupied Palestinian territory totalled US$ 4.80 million and US$ 4.77 million, respectively.

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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. UNRWA encourages all Member States to work collectively to exert all possible efforts to fully fund the Agency's Programme Budget. 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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