PRESS RELEASE

UNRWA Commissioner-General Concludes Second Official Visit to South Korea



During the mission to South Korea, the UNRWA Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl (second from left)
met with several senior officials at the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the Deputy Minister for Multilateral Affairs, Choi Jong-moon (third from left). *© 2016 UNRWA Photo by Leslie Yun*

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The Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Pierre Krähenbühl, visited the Republic of Korea on 27 and 28 October on his second official mission to the country to explore potential opportunities for deeper engagement with South Korea and raise greater awareness about the situation of Palestine refugees in the Middle East. During the mission, the South Korean Representative Office to the Palestinian Authority announced an additional contribution to UNRWA for 2016 that will support Palestine refugees affected by the ongoing Syria crisis, specifically addressing the needs of Palestine refugee girls impacted by the conflict, as part of the broader South Korean initiative, 'Better Life for Girls'.

Over the course of the two-day visit, the Commissioner-General met with senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the Deputy Minister for Multilateral Affairs, Choi Jong-moon, and the Director-General for African and Middle Eastern Affairs, Kwon Hee-seog, as well as the President of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Kim In-shik. In these meetings, Mr. Krähenbühl expressed his appreciation for South Korea's ongoing support to the Agency's core programmes and projects, including in the fields of education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and discussed the many challenges facing Palestine refugees in the region, particularly in Syria and Gaza. The Ministry officials, in turn, emphasized their continued support for the Agency's work and for Palestine refugees and expressed interest in further expanding the partnership with UNRWA.

In addition, the Commissioner-General met with senior parliamentarians from South Korea's National Assembly, including the Chair of the Committee on Strategy and Finance, Cho Kyoung-tae, and the Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Unification, Shim Jae-kwon, who expressed their keen interest in the situation in the Agency's fields of operations.

Mr. Krähenbühl also met with Seoul-based representatives from various international organizations and diplomatic missions, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as well as several academics from the Myongji University Institute of Middle Eastern Affairs in a roundtable setting.

"This visit was a welcome opportunity to build upon our ongoing partnership with South Korea, whose own development experience and history serves as a model and a source

of inspiration for the Agency and for Palestine refugees," said the Commissioner-General. "We are deeply encouraged by the positive reception during our mission in Korea and look forward to greater cooperation with South Korea as we mutually seek to create a better future for Palestine refugee youth."

In recent years, South Korea has increased its contributions to UNRWA, contributing a total of US$ 2.29 million in 2015. In addition to annual contributions to the Agency's core programmes and services, South Korea is currently supporting several projects in Gaza, including Gaza Gateway, the Agency's IT social enterprise aimed at providing employment and skills development opportunities for young Palestine refugees; the Interactive Learning Programme, which seeks to ensure universal access to education for Palestine refugee students; and a basic design study to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of the Agency's TVET programming.

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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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