PRESS RELEASE

Amid global refugee crisis, students in Europe, the USA, Syria, Lebanon and Gaza build solidarity beyond borders



Homs camp, Syria © 2015 UNRWA Photo by Taghrid Mohammad

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East Jerusalem

This autumn, Palestine refugee students in five schools in Syria, Gaza and Lebanon will be paired to explore and advocate for the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 ‘Quality

education' with their peers in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America through the 'My Voice-My School' project, made possible with the support of generous donors, including the European Union.

Over 12 weeks, students such as Roos, Finn, Amina, Salim and Rama will work together on a joint classroom project to explore the concept of quality global education and to identify and propose improvements within their own school and community. Throughout the project, three online video exchanges will allow students to share ideas and discuss the progress made. Final project results will be shared with the media, the European Union and national decision-makers, as well as with UNRWA education experts. This will allow the students to be the very advocates of their own quality education. The project and student work can be followed on the www.unrwa.org/myvoicemsychool page.

The project is funded by the European Union and contributors to the UNRWA Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal and is implemented by UNRWA in partnership with Digital Explorer and Qatar Foundation International.

The turmoil faced by people in Gaza, Syria and the broader region makes education all the more precious for the half a million Palestine refugee students enrolled in close to 700 UNRWA schools. Education builds resilience and generates hope, especially during conflict and protracted crises. This innovative project allows students to break the isolation brought on by war and occupation and gives them a sense of solidarity across borders while they develop skills to advocate for their education and future.

"This project provides opportunities for students to voice their ideas on what makes education 'quality'," explains Dr. Caroline Pontefract, the UNRWA Director of Education. "It reflects the principles and practices of the UNRWA education programme by empowering students to think and share ideas about teaching and learning."

Co-developed by UNRWA and Digital Explorer, My Voice-My School was launched three years ago to empower youth by giving them a voice and the opportunity to communicate across borders on issues that matter to them. This innovative programme combines programme teacher development, student-centred learning, use of information and communication technology in the classroom, and communication and advocacy, as the media covers the live student exchanges and discussions between the students.

MY VOICE-MY SCHOOL IN THE MEDIA

In the 2015/16 school year, Palestine refugees from Syria had the opportunity to express their passion for education during the live exchanges with students in London, which were recorded by UNRWA. As a result, digital and media assets were produced. They revealed compelling stories which were flagged to media outlets through press releases. This resulted in coverage by CNN, BBC World Report, The Evening Standard, Mashable, London Live, Skype's blog and east London newspapers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

EU and UNRWA: Together for Palestine Refugees

Since 1971, the European Union and UNRWA have maintained a strategic partnership governed by the shared objective to support the human development, humanitarian and protection needs of Palestine refugees and promote stability in the Middle East. Today, the European Union is the largest multilateral provider of international assistance to Palestine refugees. This reliable and predictable support from the European Union enables UNRWA to provide core services to more than 5 million Palestine refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza, including quality education for roughly half a million children and primary health care for more than 3.5 million patients. Collectively, the EU and its Member States are also among the largest contributors to the Agency's humanitarian emergency appeals and projects in response to various crises and specific needs across the region. The partnership between the European Union and UNRWA has allowed millions of Palestine refugees to be better educated, live healthier lives, access employment opportunities and improve their living conditions, thus contributing to the development of the entire region.

UNRWA Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal

The conflict in Syria intensified in 2016, leading to heightened humanitarian and protection needs among an increasingly vulnerable population. Affected communities continue to suffer serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law as a result of indiscriminate and widespread attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Increasing numbers of people have been forced to flee to other locations inside Syria, neighbouring countries or further afield.

Six years into the war, efforts to deliver life-saving assistance and essential services to Palestine refugees in Syria continued amidst an increasingly insecure operational environment. UNRWA in Syria provides vital humanitarian support and health and education services to 450,000 Palestine refugees. Over 95 per cent of the Palestine refugees in Syria are wholly reliant on UNRWA humanitarian aid.

PRESS CONTACTS

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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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