من الشعب الياباني
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Joint Press Release
Funded by the Government of Japan through UNDP
Tokyo Football League II Celebrates End of Season in Gaza

Gaza, 11 September 2017 – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Japan, in partnership with the Palestinian Football Association, celebrated the closing of the Tokyo Football League II with the final match between Rafah and Al Shujaiya teams at the Palestine Stadium in Gaza city. The project is part of their shared commitment to empower youth in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank through the Tamkeen - Emergency Response to Palestinian Youth through Sport Initiative project, funded by the Government of Japan for the amount of USD 386,000. Around 5,200 male and female youth participated in Tamkeen's various sports activities across the Gaza Strip.

Mr Ibrahim Abu Saleem, Deputy Chairman of Palestinian Football Association thanked the Government of Japan and UNDP for their support to Tokyo league II. "Tokyo League II gave the opportunity to young players to practice their favourite sport. Not only that, but through UNDP we are also developing sports' infrastructure by reconstructing and rehabilitating five playgrounds across the Gaza Strip".

H.E. Takeshi Okubo, Ambassador for Palestinian Affairs and Representative of Japan to Palestine, thanked UNDP, the Palestinian Football Association and various other partners for the successful arrangement of the Tokyo Football League II. "Many Palestinian youth, especially in Gaza, are most affected by the successive wars and the continued closures. Something should be done to revive their hopes, giving them an opportunity to express themselves in a public space. For these reasons, the Government of Japan has been providing assistance in promoting the sports sector, thereby encouraging the youth who are under enormous challenges. Playing sports enhances the sense of citizenship, inclusion and participation. These are vital values to instil in a society that is trying to heal after being devastated by violence and divisions. Sports also play an important role in peace building," he added.

During the past three months, 56 teams competed for the championship of the Tokyo Football League II. Rafah team won the final match and received the League Cup; medals were also presented to the players in the second-place team. The Tokyo Football League is organized by the Palestinian Football Association for youth under the age of 19. The League includes teams from different refugee camps as well as various towns and cities in the Gaza Strip. Over 4,000 people participated in the 2017 Tokyo League II games.

Mr Roberto Valent, UNDP Special Representative of the Administrator thanked the Government of Japan for their continuous support and highlighted that this project will increase youth's engagement in public life, ease their frustration and build social trust. "Rooted in the spirit of the Tokyo League initiative, this project is empowering youth by providing them with a mix of sports and life skills that will equip them to take lead in confronting challenges and aspire to be the next generation of leaders".

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The project is a continuation of the work started in 2016, where 112 football games took place, focusing on immediate as well as long term sustainable programmes for sports that will provide Gaza youth, who have been affected psychologically and physically by the protracted conflict and blockade, with something to aim for that can be transformative in the way they and others see life. The project's strategic objective is to build up the foundation of sports, for both males and females, in clubs and federations, to become the future feeding ground for Palestinian sports.

It is worth noting that the Government of Japan is considered one of UNDP's strongest partners. The Government of Japan has provided more than USD 344 million to UNDP/PAPP since 1993 for project implementation in the areas of infrastructure, rubble removal, health, education, agriculture, access to justice, and others. The Government of Japan has been providing over USD 1.8 billion worth of assistance to Palestine since 1993, contributing to improving the lives of the Palestinian people.

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