PRESS RELEASE

The Vision Project for Blind and Visually Impaired Children in Gaza Successfully Concluded

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East Jerusalem

The Vision Project for over two hundred blind and visually impaired children in Gaza has come to a successful conclusion, with teachers and children affirming the transformative impact of the project. The education initiative for 217 children uses cutting-edge "Voice Dream Reader" technology, which allows digital information imported onto mobile devices to be read in a human voice.

UNRWA is grateful to project funder, the UK-registered charity, Interpal for their generous support. "This project has had a tangible impact in the lives of children whose education prospects had been severely curtailed. Thanks to the Vision Project they have been given hope and a sense of optimism for a better future.", said Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl.

The project saw 33 UNRWA teachers trained to use Voice Dream Reader technology in the classroom. The Voice Dream Reader app was generously donated by its inventor and CEO of Voice Dream Reader, Winston Chen.

"As a charity helping Palestinians in desperate need, Interpal is proud to have supported the Vision Project. I am delighted that our $500,000 grant to UNRWA, the largest in Interpal's history, was used to fund the technology-based project in its entirety", said Ibrahim Hewitt, Chairman of the Interpal Trustees. "Our work is empowering visually impaired children — whose suffering often results from armed conflict — to benefit from improved education and life chances. Interpal has long been bringing real change for the better in the lives of Palestinian children in Gaza, and our partnership with UNRWA to deliver this project has not only boosted the impact of our work but also been a highlight of our 20th anniversary year."

Each child received a mobile device at school and all the textbooks were made available to them digitally. This not only opened up vast sources of information, learning and creativity but also supplemented their basic education, and provided

them with tools that will prepare them for adulthood, including employment and full integration into society.

Beyond the Vision Project, Interpal has also provided $55,000 to support the installation of solar panels at UNRWA's 'Rehabilitation Centre for the Visually Impaired' (RCVI). The RCVI is the first of its kind in Gaza, serving over 1,250 children and the solar panels will help ensure that the frequent blackouts don't negatively impact the important work being carried out.

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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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