PRESS RELEASE

# United Nations Secretary General Urges Member States to Make UNRWA funds “Sustainable” Praising the Agency’s “Indispensable Role” in the Middle East

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In a landmark report presented today, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, urges all member states actively to support and make the funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) "sustainable, predictable and sufficient".

Mr. Guterres underscores that member states “widely value the indispensable role" UNRWA plays in the provision of essential services to the Palestine Refugees and the “impact it has had in the context of the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict". The Secretary-General further notes the deep recognition among UN members of UNRWA's contribution to preserving the rights and dignity of Palestine Refugees. His report says “the agency was described by member states as “unique” and “special”, and its contribution to political stability in a region experiencing significant volatility was highlighted by a broad cross section of member states.” UNRWA’s role in the "mitigation of extremism, its stabilizing influence and its contribution to peace and security” is also highlighted.

At a time when the Middle East region is plagued by widespread conflict, violence and radicalization, the value of UNRWA's services to Palestine Refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and a widely shared concern about repeated shortfalls and lasting financial insecurity for the Agency, served as a trigger for consultations which led to the report. These were carried out by Switzerland and Turkey on behalf of the Secretary-General, in New York, Geneva and beyond in recent months.

The Secretary General notes in his report that recurring financial crises “threaten to disrupt service provision to as many as 5.3 million Palestine refugees, intensifying the deep uncertainty this already vulnerable population is exposed to."

In the summer of 2015, UNRWA came within days of being forced to delay the opening of its 700 schools for 500,000 Palestine Refugee boys and girls because of a major funding gap, sending shockwaves through the community that considers education as the critical basis for the preservation of hope and opportunity for its children. Palestine Refugees, host governments, UNRWA partners and donors agreed that such a crisis should never be allowed to happen again.

The central message of the Secretary-General's report is that a combination of initiatives is required to stabilize UNRWA's financial situation and that this must be "vigorously pursued" by all UN member states. These should include strengthened and predictable voluntary funding from a broader base of donors; setting up and accessing the instruments of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank, as well as continued and possibly increased contributions from the UN's regular budget. In committing his leadership to concrete and prompt action, the Secretary General notes that he will work with UN members “to ensure that Palestine refugees are not left behind in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030."

UNRWA's Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl, welcomed the unprecedented nature of the initiative: "I wish to thank wholeheartedly the Secretary-General for his leadership and support. I am very encouraged by the recommendations and new avenues presented in his report. I am deeply grateful to Switzerland and Turkey for their remarkable energy and engagement in carrying out the consultations and I welcome the strong solidarity and valuable contributions by member states and international financial institutions." Mr Krähenbühl noted that “the importance of the report lies both in its renewed focus on the plight of

Palestine refugees and in the determination to improve the resourcing of UNRWA's vital services."

He underlined that "while nothing is more important today than a just and durable political solution to the plight of Palestine Refugees, it is imperative in the meantime that UNRWA be in position to live up to its mandate and ensure the provision of its key services in education, health-care, relief and social services, camp improvement, micro-finance and protection, as well as its emergency response. This," he said, "is an investment in the human capital of the region and in the preservation of the rights, dignity and hope of Palestine Refugees."

**To read the full report click her.**

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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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