PRESS RELEASE

The European Union and UNRWA Reaffirm Strong Commitment to Serving Palestine Refugees

27 February 2018
East Jerusalem

The European Union (EU) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are holding a Strategic Dialogue on the way forward for their partnership. The discussion takes place in light of the current financial crisis facing UNRWA and the need to broaden its donor base and continue reforming the Agency. The EU and UNRWA remain committed to protecting the rights of Palestine refugees and continue the delivery of essential services to more than 5 million Palestine refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, has said that " The European Union stands by its commitment to Palestine refugees and UNRWA. We have accelerated our contribution to UNRWA's Programme Budget in 2018 and are committing to maintaining the present level of support to 2020. I recognise the importance of providing predictability to UNRWA in these difficult times. The Agency is a crucial stabilising factor in the Middle East. We stress the need, in parallel, for UNRWA to pursue deep reforms and to focus on the needs of the most vulnerable refugees."".

UNRWA Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl, expressed gratitude that "once again, UNRWA could count on the support of the EU to overcome the unprecedented challenges it faces. The EU has been one of our most reliable donors for decades. I am very grateful for the support of the EU in mobilising the international community around a concerted global response to the most severe

financial crisis in our seventy year history and helping us build new funding alliances needed to ensure improved income diversity."

EU funding supports crucial UNRWA programmes in education, health, relief and social services; providing a quality education for half a million children and primary health care for more than 3.5 million patients in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The Strategic Dialogue discussed the challenging budgetary situation of UNRWA, which has been exacerbated by the recent announcement by the US government to withhold a considerable part of its funding.

The EU and UNRWA also discussed the reform agenda of the Agency, agreeing on the need to safeguard the Agency's core services, especially to the most marginalised refugees and exploring joint advocacy opportunities to highlight the plight of Palestine refugees at the global level.

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Background Information

Since 1971, the European Union and UNRWA have maintained a strategic partnership governed by the shared objective of supporting the human development, humanitarian and protection needs of Palestine refugees and promote stability in the Middle East. In June 2017, the EU's commitment was reaffirmed with the signing of the Joint EU-UNRWA Joint Declaration on support to UNRWA (2017-2020).

Today, the European Union is the largest multilateral provider of international assistance to Palestine refugees. The overall contribution in 2017 amounted to 110 million euro, including 102 million euro for the UNRWA programme Budget.

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

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.

More info

The Office of the European Union Representative (West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA)
EU cooperation with Palestine (website of the Directorate general of European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations).
Joint Declaration between the EU and UNRWA on European Union support to UNRWA (2017-2020)
Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the European Parliament Plenary Session on the Situation of UNRWA - 07/02/2018
Speech by Commissioner Johannes Hahn at the European Parliament Plenary Session on the Situation of UNRWA – 07/02/2017
EU-UNRWA Partnership for Palestine refugees
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Middle East
EU-UNRWA Partnership for Palestine refugees

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