PRESS RELEASE

Their dreams fly high: UNRWA students fly thousands of kites demanding their schools remain open



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Today in 700 UNRWA schools across the Middle East, thousands of students flew and carried kites to send a message of hope, demanding that all the schools run by the Agency remain open, in spite of the financial crisis confronting UNRWA. More than 500,000 students took part in kite flying events in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank, where the Agency provides a daily education to 525,000 children.

This ambitious initiative comes in advance of an Extraordinary Ministerial Conference in Rome on 15 March convened by Jordan, Sweden and Egypt to bridge UNRWA's funding shortfall for 2018 of 446 million US$. UNRWA has described this as the worst financial crisis in its seventy year history.

Ahmad Jamal, Secretary of UNRWA's student parliament urged the international community to go to Rome with additional funds for the Agency. "On behalf of half a million children, the next generation in the Middle East, I appeal to you from my heart. I respectfully ask for your support to help us achieve our full potential". Referring to the global fund raising initiative, #DignityIsPriceess, launched by UNRWA in January, he said, "hand in hand with UNRWA, we can, we will deliver, for our families, for our communities and for the Middle East. Our Dignity is Priceless".

UNRWA Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl, endorsed the call by the students. "Together we stand for the rights and dignity of Palestine refugees", he said "Together we also stand for the integrity, honor and mandate of UNRWA. We will defend them with passion and transform worries into positive energy and creative new initiatives. As a symbol of how strongly we feel about our services, we called on UNRWA students in all fields to fly kites today over our 700 schools as a message to the world that their dignity is indeed priceless!"

If UNRWA's critical funding gap is not filled, not only is the daily education of over half a million children at risk, but the Agency's health services may also impacted, such as the vaccination of 180,000 children this year and 9 million patient consultations delivered annually by UNRWA medical staff. In addition, the Agency delivers cash or food assistance to 1.7 million refugees, of which a million are in Gaza; supports 40,000 disabled refugees; provides recreational activities for 200,000 children and disburses forty million dollars of micro finance loans annually.

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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.

For more information, please contact:

Christopher Gunness
UNRWA Spokesperson
Mobile: +972 (0)54 240 2659
Office: +972 (0)2 589 0267
c.gunness@unrwa.org
Twitter: @ChrisGunness

Sami Mshasha
UNRWA Arabic Spokesperson
Mobile: +972 (0)54 216 8295
Office: +972 (0)2 589 0724
s.mshasha@unrwa.org