PRESS RELEASE

Health of Palestine refugees: 70 years after the original displacement, the “Nakba”
No health without dignity

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Geneva

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has released its annual Health Report for 2017, which provides important information regarding the health situation of Palestine refugees in the Agency’s five fields of operation – Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza and Syria, as well as the UNRWA health programme.

The annual report coincides with the 70th anniversary of the mass displacement of Palestinians known as “the Nakba” or “the Catastrophe”. This anniversary puts the spotlight on the world’s longest standing protracted refugee crisis, and is a reminder that the population of over 5.3 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA continue to live amidst conflict, violence and occupation, and aspire to a just and lasting solution to their plight.

The report charts 68 years of progress in the Agency’s Health Programme and its evolution to meet the changing health needs of Palestine refugees. In 2017, about three million registered Palestine refugees received health services free of charge at 143 UNRWA primary health care centres, which provided some 9.2 million medical consultations.

“Protecting and promoting the health of registered Palestine refugees, is at the heart of our mandate, enabling them to achieve the highest attainable level of health until a just and lasting resolution of the Palestine refugee issue is achieved, based on UN resolutions and international law”, remarked Dr. Akihiro Seita, UNRWA Director of Health. “Our health services are literally life-saving in places

like Syria, where the conflict has just entered its eighth year, as well as in the occupied Palestinian territory including East Jerusalem, which saw the 50th anniversary of the Israeli occupation in 2017, and in Gaza which has now been under more than a decade of blockade".

The report underlines UNRWA's commitment to universal health coverage in its free of charge services made available to all Palestine refugees. It also shows that UNRWA continued to maintain strong maternal and child health indictors, such as vaccination coverage, early registration for preventive care and the percentage of pregnant women attending at least four antenatal case visits. Moreover, during 2017 screening and outreach activities for non-communicable diseases were strengthened.

In addition to sustaining our reform programme and the Family Health Team model, supported by our e-health system, UNRWA has expanded mental health and psychosocial support as well as hospitalization support to those who are in greatest need of these services.

Dr. Seita concluded, "The efforts to modernize UNRWA's health services would not have been possible without the generous support of donor countries, host authorities, the World Health Organization, other UN agencies, and local and international organizations. On the top of all is the dedication and commitment of our staff to improve the well-being of Palestine refugees. UNRWA will continue to advocate for and protect the rights of Palestine refugees, including the right to dignified health services. We believe that there is no health without peace, justice and dignity."

A full version of the UNRWA Health Programme's Annual Report 2017 can be downloaded via the following hyperlink: click here.

From the UNRWA Health Programme Annual Report 2017

The registered Palestine refugee population was about 6.0 million at the end of 2017. Out of these, the number of refugees accessing UNRWA health services (the 'served population') was about 3.7 million, equivalent to 61 per cent of the registered population. These refugees were served by 3,320 UNRWA health staff. The average daily medical consultations per doctor were 78, and the total number of outpatient consultations was 8.3 million. The total number of dental consultations including both screening and curative stood at more than 1.5 million.

In addition, by the end of 2017, the number of newly registered pregnant women was 96,803, of whom, 98.6 per cent were protected against tetanus. The post-natal care coverage reached up to 95.0 per cent of pregnant women. Family planning was offered to 164,932 women, with 28,162 registered during 2017.

The number of patients with non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is increasing consistently by approximately 5.0 per cent per year. The total number of patients attending our health centres with diabetes was over 42,000; with both diabetes and hypertension was over 105,000; and with hypertension only was over 119,000. The control rate for patients diagnosed with diabetes was 44.3 per cent, according to defined criteria. The control rate was higher for patients with hypertension, reaching 69.0 per cent. Risk factors among NCD patients included smoking (10.7 per cent), physical inactivity (44.1 per cent), and obesity (55.6 per cent), and raised cholesterol (46.5 per cent).

Agency-wide prevalence rates of diabetes mellitus and hypertension were 12.1 per cent and 18.6 per cent, respectively, for patients who were aged 40 years and older. Analysis for drugs expenditure revealed 53.5 per cent was spent on medicines for the treatment of NCDs.

Due to the high rate of immunization coverage for all age groups, no cases of vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks were observed during 2017. For example, the immunization coverage rate of children 12 months old for all vaccines was 99.7 per cent, and a rate of 99.0 per cent was achieved for the immunization coverage of children 18 months old (boosters).

The total number of continuing users of modern contraceptive methods Agency-wide increased to 164,296 in 2017, an annual increase of 4.2 per cent. During 2017, UNRWA primary health-care facilities cared for 96,803 pregnant women, representing a coverage rate of 84.2 per cent of all expected pregnancies among the served refugee population. Lastly, analysis of the 2017 data reveals that the Agency-wide percentage of pregnant women who paid four or more antenatal visits was 92.0 per cent, with an average of 6.0 visits Agency-wide.

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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 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA across its five fields of operation. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, including East Jerusalem 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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