**Statement by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland, Simon Coveney, on cut to UNRWA funding**

Tánaiste Simon Coveney has reacted to the US decision to end all funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), following on from other heavy cuts to US support for the Palestinian people.

"*I believe this step is both heartless and dangerous, and will impact negatively on the Middle East region. And I have made my views on this absolutely clear in contacts with the US administration.*

*I have seen first-hand the excellent work that UNRWA does in providing services to millions of people, including those in Gaza who have nowhere else to turn. It provides food aid to over a million Gazans, people who cannot feed themselves due to the economic impact of the blockade. Its education system promotes the values of peace to the children it serves, young girls and boys caught up in a conflict through no fault of their own and denied the normality others take for granted. Its health facilities save countless lives. Its work is essential in relieving some of the strain on Lebanon and Jordan, which also host hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees.*

*These and other basic services are necessary, and will remain necessary, until a resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict can be negotiated which meets the needs of both parties and resolves all final status issues, including the return of Palestine refugees. That is where the focus of international action should be. Regrettably, as with the re-location of the US Embassy to Jerusalem, yesterday's decision makes winning support for any US-led peace initiative significantly more difficult.*

*Ireland is a longstanding supporter of UNRWA. We will continue that assistance and discuss with our EU and other partners what more can be done to support its work."*