Press Release

Taawon (Welfare Association) and Open Society Foundations (OSF) deliver vital support to UNRWA school children



The Director of Communications and Spokesperson for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), Sami M'shasha (left), and the Director General of Taawon (Welfare Association), Dr. Tafeeda Jarbawi, shake hands after signing a Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies and The Open Society Foundations on 18 December 2018. © 2018 Photo courtesy of Taawon

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Today, the Director General of Taawon (Welfare Association), Dr. Tafeeda Jarbawi, and the UNRWA Director of Communications and Spokesperson, Mr. Sami Mshasha, signed a US$ 1.5 million Memorandum of Understanding to support the UNRWA education programme.

The grant, which has been made possible through joint matched funding from Taawon and the Open Society Foundations, will enhance critical thinking skills at UNRWA schools and provide psycho-social and counselling support to Palestine refugee students across Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Syria.

More than 250,000 Palestine refugee children, their teachers and the wider UNRWA school community will benefit from the programme. Critical thinking is an important life skill which not only helps students to achieve their full potential, but can also help promote self-development, participation and encourage positive social behaviours. UNRWA school counsellors play a vital role in providing essential psychosocial support services to UNRWA students to better enable them to cope with the many challenges they face.

The Director of the UNRWA Department of Education, Dr Caroline Pontefract, welcomed the important contribution: “Strengthening critical thinking skills and providing children with counselling and psychosocial support can significantly contribute to students overall well-being and help improve learning outcomes for Palestine refugee children. We are very grateful to Taawon and Open Society Foundations for their generous support, particularly during a year when UNRWA has faced unprecedented challenges to continue to fund its education programme.”

The Director General of Taawon, Dr. Tafeeda Jarbawi, stated: “Since Taawon’s establishment in 1983, education has always been amongst the top priority sectors it most heavily invested in. To date, over US$ 250 million have been invested by Taawon in education in Palestine and the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Taawon values its long-term partnership with Open Society Foundations and its continuous cooperation with UNRWA over the past years to support Palestinian refugees. We are very pleased, on Taawon’s 35th anniversary, to collaborate with the Open Society Foundations to support the UNRWA education program to continue the provision of critical thinking skills and psychosocial support to Palestinian refugee students."

Anthony Richter, Director of Special Initiatives at the Open Society Foundations, said "This grant underlines our recognition that UNRWA plays an essential and irreplaceable role in promoting the rights and well-being of Palestine refugees across the Middle East, including providing education to more than half a million children. It also reflects the Open Society’s commitment to supporting high quality and inclusive education for refugee children around the world."

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 5.4 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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