Press Release

# United Nations Secretary General visits Baqa'a camp in Jordan in solidarity with UNRWA



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The Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, visited Baqa'a camp in Jordan today, where nearly 120,000 registered Palestine refugees live and engaged with staff and beneficiaries of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

On his visit, he met students from the UNRWA Agency-wide student parliament (ASP), camp representatives, including women, and engaged with young pupils during lessons on human rights and science. During a visit to a school in the camp, Jordan's largest for Palestine refugees north of Amman, the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of continuing to fund the vital services UNRWA provides to millions of Palestine refugees in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

“The stories I heard today were very compelling, both in showing the strength and courage of Palestinian refugees, and in conveying their concern about their future,” said the Secretary-General. “What remains with me are words of hope and determination of men and women, young and old.”

UNRWA faced its biggest financial challenge in 2018 following the decision by the United States to cut US$ 300 million from its funding to the Agency. The global campaign #Dignity is Priceless, combined with robust internal saving measures, allowed the Agency to entirely overcome a deficit of US$446 million in 2018.

A group of women of various backgrounds, connected to UNRWA through education or social services, told the stories of their transformation. “We started selling books in our small home,” said Rima Al-Sallal, co-founder of online bookstore Jamaloon. “Today, we are the largest online booksellers in the Middle East and it is time to give back to UNRWA,” she added, describing initiatives that her company implements to help promote the Agency.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl joined the Secretary-General in a lively discussion with a group of boys and girls from the ASP which promote a culture of respect and tolerance and play a positive role in schools and community-wide.

Mr. Krähenbühl reiterated his commitment to keeping the 122,000 UNRWA students in Jordan in school this year and said that the Agency is currently investing important efforts to rehabilitate and upgrade schools in the Kingdom, which will improve learning conditions for some tens of thousands of students.

“Every conversation with representatives of our school parliaments is a reminder of the journey that these young girls and boys have undertaken and proof of how they have grown into confident and ambitious youth who meet with the United Nations Secretary-General to discuss their hopes and aspirations ,” said Pierre Krähenbühl. “Nothing illustrates the success of a Palestine refugee like academic achievement. Maintaining the education in our schools is akin to giving these young men and women a passport that makes them global citizens. We will not compromise on that,” he added.

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**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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