Press Release

UNRWA AND FLANDERS RENEW PARTNERSHIP FOR THREE YEARS

13 March 2019



Minister-President of Flanders, Geert Bourgeois (left) and Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Pierre Krähenbühl (right), shake hands after signing a three-year agreement on in Brussels in the value of EUR 479,000 to support core UNRWA services from 2019 to 2021. © 2019 Courtesy of the Government of Flanders

Today in Brussels, the Minister-President of Flanders, Geert Bourgeois, and the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Pierre Krähenbühl, signed a three-year agreement (2019-2021) in the value of EUR 479,000 to support the core services of UNRWA. The Government of Flanders guarantees an early disbursement of the funding.

This new multi-year agreement – the third one between UNRWA and the Government of Flanders since 2010 - is an important stepping stone on the path to predictable funding that will allow UNRWA to continue to provide uninterrupted services to Palestine refugees, including education to 532,000 Palestine refugee boys and girls in 715 UNRWA schools across the Middle East.

Education has long been a priority sector for the Government of Flanders, which is reflected in its support to My Voice, My School, an initiative that allows students from Flemish schools and UNRWA schools in Syria and Gaza to exchange and share their experiences.

Commenting on the signing of the multi-year agreement, Minister-President Bourgeois reaffirmed that: “Our commitment is a clear recognition of the crucial difference UNRWA makes to the lives of vulnerable Palestine refugees and to the stability of the Middle East. It is of utmost importance to invest in education to avoid a lost generation. For Palestine refugee children, this means the possibility to keep hoping and to build their future; but it also means fighting radicalization and is, therefore, an investment in our own security. Given this global interconnectedness, multilateral cooperation is the only option. Supporting UNRWA is our humanitarian duty, even more so in light of the increasing health needs of Palestine refugees and the remarkable efforts of UNRWA and the international donor community to cope with the unprecedented financial shortfall”.

In addition to signing a multi-year agreement with UNRWA, Flanders will support the 2019 UNRWA Syria Regional Crisis Appeal in the amount of EUR 100,000. “The impact of the Syria conflict is even worse on Palestine refugees in light of the UNRWA financial crisis, which led to a 50 per cent reduction of both the distribution rounds for cash and food and the amounts of assistance provided per person. Clearly, this has the potential to have a detrimental impact on Palestine refugees’ resilience and copying mechanisms,” said Minister-President Bourgeois.

Expressing his appreciation for the double-contribution, UNRWA Commissioner-General Krähenbühl stated that “UNRWA is proud to partner with the Government of Flanders in addressing the needs of Palestine refugees, in particular through the provision of education services, which are so crucial to preserving hope and opportunities for 532,000 girls and boys in our 715 schools. I highly value the trust shown by the Government of Flanders and its decision to support UNRWA through a multi-year agreement, which provides greater predictability. I also thank Flanders for the provision of EUR 100,000 towards our 2019 Syria Regional Crisis Appeal at this critical time. This additional support, which comes at a time when leaders are gathering in Brussels for the third conference on Syria, will help UNRWA provide vital life-saving assistance to Palestine refugees in this war-ravaged country until the conflict ends. Both contributions send an important message of solidarity to Palestine refugees”.

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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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