



concluding remarks from the commissioner-general

Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl said that the meeting had been invaluablely instructive and expressed thanks to all members for openly sharing their views and advice. A variety of opinions had been presented regarding the key challenges that stakeholders faced and the impact of the current situation on the Palestine refugees. Frank and transparent discussion would be necessary in order to adequately address the pressing issues facing the refugees who were the focus of stakeholders' collective efforts. He hoped that the Advisory Commission had appreciated the transparency of the presentations and stressed that no one had higher expectations of UNRWA than the Agency itself.

Advisory Commission members had emphasized that the political and human plight of Palestine refugees must remain the central issue. The Commissioner-General assured members that this was the case and reiterated that the Agency's mandate was not for sale. Members had also stressed the need to support host countries, particularly Lebanon and Jordan, which were dealing with the consequences of the long-term presence of Palestine refugee communities and the unresolved political questions that were inextricably linked to the refugee question. Those countries' burdens had been further compounded by the influx of Syrian refugees. UNRWA, the United Nations system and the international community must be supportive of all countries affected by those dynamics.

Advisory Commission members had shared their expectations regarding the scale of the Agency's activities and their concerns about any possible cuts in services and the quality of services, among other issues. They had also expressed support for the Agency's efforts with regard to protection and improving its ability to develop poverty-related strategies. However, members had raised concerns regarding the Agency's financial situation. The Commissioner-General hoped that he had addressed those concerns adequately in his detailed account of the planned internal measures to reduce the General Fund deficit. Once those measures were implemented, UNRWA would reach out to donor countries for additional funding to cover the remainder of the deficit.

The Agency would hold consultations regarding its 2015 budgets and adopt a clear, three-pronged approach to address its financial needs. First, UNRWA would seek to maintain and, where possible, develop further funding support from long-standing donors. Second, it would attempt to broaden its donor base. In

that area, he noted that there were encouraging signs that the Agency would be able to expand its donor base in the Arab world and East Asia. Third, UNRWA would hold internal discussions on improving its financial sustainability.

The Agency would be moving forward with an ambitious yet focused medium-term strategy that would set forth in a transparent manner the needs of Palestine refugee communities. However, as it would not be feasible for it to meet every one of those needs, UNRWA would continue to collaborate with host countries in that regard.

Turning to members' calls for realism concerning the medium-term strategy, he assured the Advisory Commission that it would be impossible for the Agency to ignore its financial constraints. Realism, however, should not be limited to financial considerations; it should also apply to the Agency's commitment to Palestine refugee communities, its strengths in delivering services and the areas in which it could seek support from partners. Many participants had noted that it was not a question of diminishing the role of UNRWA but rather finding ways to deliver better services, taking into account the Agency's financial challenges.

Some members had called for the medium-term strategy to be a decision-making document, while others had requested that it should be a resource-mobilization platform. Accordingly, the medium-term strategy would seek to strike a balance between aspirations and financial and other pressures.

Cost drivers should be discussed further. While it could not be denied that human resources were a core cost driver, the Agency's bureaucracy was relatively small compared to its service-delivery side, with most salaries being paid to UNRWA staff on the ground. The main cause of the budget deficit was the cost of service delivery, not administrative overhead. Other primary cost drivers were the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the regional situation, including the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. For example, UNRWA incurred US\$ 7 million in additional costs related to access in the Gaza Strip. Those funds could be put to better use elsewhere.

He shared participants' concerns regarding the security of UNRWA staff. Investment in enhanced security for staff and the unacceptably small amount currently spent for that purpose were issues that were just as important as calls for realism and internal measures to improve cost efficiency.

Management would update Advisory Commission members on the progress made in developing the next draft of the medium-term strategy, taking into account their feedback on the zero draft. In that connection, the Commissioner-General requested that members should adhere to the timetable established for consultations throughout the drafting process.

The Palestine refugees must remain the starting point of any discussion about UNRWA and its activities, rather than the Agency's deficit, which would ultimately be addressed. While he wished it were possible to provide Advisory Commission members with the reassurance they sought concerning the Agency's future, he hoped to be able to provide more reassurance to the Palestine refugees about their future.