

Geneva Conference Core Group

Minutes of Meeting

UNRWA Jordan Headquarters

January 13, 2004 10:00 AM

Core Group Participants: See attached as Annex I

UNRWA Staff: DCG, DER, DEO, ERPO (SS), Kabir Shaikh, Bill Lee

1. Welcome

The Deputy Commissioner General (DCG) started the meeting by welcoming participants. She introduced Mr. Steven Siqueira (s.siqueira@unrwa.org), who would be assisting with preparations for the conference, and noted that the Department of External Relations would be adding additional resources to support the conference, including one additional resource in Jerusalem and one in Geneva.

2. Update on Recent Developments

UN Calendar: The Director for External Relations (DER) started his presentation by alerting participants that the Conference is now on the official UN Calendar, which is significant as this confers the Conference with an official UN status.

Public Launch: DER noted that the Conference would be launched publicly at the end of January. The preliminary plans for this launch include a small signing ceremony between the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and UNRWA, coordinated with a visit by the SDC Director General, Walter Fust. Media would be invited to participate. At the launch, the Commissioner General (Com-Gen) and DG Fust would make initial comments to the media to lay out the plan for the Conference.

ACTION ITEM 1: UNRWA/DER to work with SDC to organize launch event, advise Core Group of dates and other relevant details.

Notifications: With reference to the status of invitations for the Conference, DER noted that notifications about the Conference had been sent to 67 countries, representing donors who have made significant contributions to the Agency in the past ten years, or donors with a potential to contribute more. An official notification will also be sent to host countries and the PLO.

DER apologized for the few errors that appeared on the initial notification and undertook to correct these errors prior to sending out the official invitations. In terms of invitations to other agencies and organizations, a notification will be going out to 15 organizations affiliated with the UN who have active programming in the region. In addition four multilateral donors from the Arab World would also be invited. Lastly, DER informed the Core Group that a notification will shortly be sent to notify the three umbrella groups based in Geneva about the meeting, and inviting their participation.

ACTION ITEM 2: DER to send notifications to host countries and key agencies and organizations.

Formal Invitations: Following the launch ceremony in late January, formal invitations will go out to all 67

donors and other invited participants.

ACTION ITEM 3: DER to send formal invitations to all participants.

Rules of Procedure/Aide Memoire: Attached to the invitation will be the Rules of Procedure and an Aide Memoire covering logistical matters. DER clarified that subject to previous agreement, meetings would be designated as “Closed” under the Rules of Procedure, and would not be designated as “Open.” DER explained that the draft Rules of Procedure which had been tabled were based on UNHCR Rules of Procedure for Executive Committee Meetings, but this draft had been simplified, given that this was not a Ministerial meeting and there would be little negotiation and no voting at this Conference. DER invited comments on these two documents from Core Group participants, asking for comments to be submitted within ten days (by Jan. 23).

ACTION ITEM 4: Core Group to provide comments on draft documents no later than January 23.

Accreditation: DER elaborated that our Geneva office, augmented by additional staff, would handle matters related to accreditation of delegates, including the production of ID badges for security. The deadline for accreditation of delegations will be set at April 30, 2004.

Delegations: With regard to delegation size, DER encouraged delegates to consult with capitals on delegation size, head of delegation and composition. He noted that the Secretariat did not intend to limit delegation size, but that the expectation, for planning purposes, was 4-5 delegates from the medium-size countries, ie: delegates from capitals, Geneva Permanent Missions, and the region.

Accommodation: DER noted that the SDC has done a block hotel booking in Geneva to ensure that some hotel space was reserved for the Conference, given that the event coincides with the International Labour Conference, and this will result in a space constraint in Geneva area hotels. Despite this booking, DER encouraged delegations to make their own bookings as early as possible.

Information sharing: DER made reference to preliminary plans to set up a special location on the UNRWA website with a unique URL, possibly password protected, so that delegates could review and access key documents on-line, facilitating work between Jerusalem, Amman and other locations, including capitals. This site would include the minutes from meetings, draft documents and any other material that the Chairs of the working groups may want to have posted.

ACTION ITEM 5: Department of Public Information to set up site and DER to advise Core Group of details

For the media and the broader public, there will also be a button on the home page linking to the backgrounder and any relevant press releases or documents.

3. UNRWA Medium Term Programme

DCG introduced UNRWA’s Medium Term Plan for the Occupied Territories (oPt), based on the request by some Core Group members for information on the plan as substantive preparations begin in the Working Groups. The plan before Core Group members was specifically developed for the OPT and as such, it was closely aligned to the priorities identified by the Palestinian Authority in Rome, focusing on the rehabilitation of services, the upgrading of physical infrastructure, and preparing the ground for economic development.

In terms of UNRWA’s internal timetable for developing a Medium Term Plan encompassing all five areas, DCG noted that input from the fields into the Director of Operations (DOPS) had been received and that DOPS is now working internally with Directors of each programme (Education, Health, Relief and Social Services),

and that the deadline for completion of this internal consultation and review would be Feb 14. Field Offices in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan have been asked to follow the same format as the one used for the oPt, which will allow the Agency to bring the material together.

Following the period of internal consultation with programme departments, an additional month would be required for review by the senior management team, at which point a comprehensive draft may be available to the Chairs of the Working Groups. DCG expected that a final version, approved by UNRWA's Executive Committee, should be available by mid/late-March.

The representative from Jordan asked whether or not the Medium Term Plan would be shared with host governments. DCG responded that in the case of the document before Core Group members dealing with the oPt, the draft was shared with the Palestinian Authority. In the case of the inputs being provided by the Field Offices she was uncertain. The Representative asserted the importance of consulting with Host country authorities, and DCG confirmed that this was an important element in developing the plans.

ACTION ITEM 6: UNRWA to circulate Medium Term Plan to Working Groups as soon as available

4. Declaration

DER noted the previous discussions on this topic and summarized his understanding that provided the language was acceptable to all parties, the issuance of a Declaration at the conclusion of the Conference would be useful. Such a document would be substantive, briefly summarize the conference objectives and aspirations, and include such elements as strong support for the Agency, a reference to financial challenges, and support for the Agency's Medium Term Plan. Such a document would avoid political references and remain de-linked from the Road Map.

The goal for the Secretariat is to have this Declaration largely pre-approved before the Conference and circulated to delegations in advance of the meeting. The Conference would then adopt the declaration.

Summarizing the proposed course of action to move this forward, DER suggested that the UNWRA secretariat would prepare a first draft and circulate it to a small, representative group of Core Group members for their initial reactions, which would help to gauge what formula might be acceptable.

The representative from Jordan suggested that the Declaration needs to deal with the main theme of the Conference and provide a summary of the Working Group findings. She supported DER's suggestion to have the secretariat draft a preliminary version for discussion with the four Working Group Chairs, and then present it to the Core Group at its last meeting before the conference.

The representative from the United States supported the principle, but reminded the Secretariat that although it was not leading any of the groups, her delegation would be anxious to not have a role in the drafting process of such a document.

The representative from the Palestine Liberation Organization agreed that the Declaration should be produced, and supported having the Secretariat prepare an initial draft for circulation.

The representative of Norway requested a clarification between what constituted the Chairman's Summary and what constituted the Declaration. DER responded that the Chairman's Summary would be a technical and more detailed summary of the proceedings, reflecting the debates held in the four areas under discussion in the Working Groups and the General Plenary debate. The Summary would necessarily link to the Declaration, but the latter document would be simpler and on a higher level. The Declaration would be more aspirational.

The Representative from the SDC (Mr. Gnaegi) asked for a clarification about the process for the development of the substantive documents through the Working Groups, and asked how all of these processes (including the proposed External Review of the Agency and the Agency's own Medium Term Planning process) would feed into the Conference. In addition, the representative asked about how this Conference would feed into the General Assembly. DER responded by clarifying that, with regard to the External Review, DFID is currently finalizing the Terms of Reference and would get those to UNRWA shortly. Until now, it is still uncertain how ambitious the Terms of Reference will be and how quickly consultants can be engaged. DER suggested that if a draft were available before April, then that would feed well into the Working Group on Resource Mobilization.

With regard to the Medium Term Plan, DER mentioned that the Com-Gen had launched this process to track where the Agency was going, and that the hope is that this process will parallel the activities of the four Working Groups, so the staff members from UNRWA will need to ensure that there is a genuine synergy between the work of the Medium Term Plan and the Working Groups.

With regard to the Working Groups, the Chairs will be instructed that they need to complete their work by the end of April. The Working Groups are intended to provide a diagnostic about the situation in each area, and since this will take place with the involvement of the Programme Departments, there will be synergies with the Medium Term Plan.

Regarding the UN General Assembly, DER suggested that the final documents from the Conference could be annexed to the Annual Report, tabled by the Com-Gen. UN Delegations and Capitals would find the Summary Record from the Conference very useful in their deliberations on the renewal of UNRWA's mandate, and would be well prepared for the debate at the GA on this matter.

The Representative from the SDC (Mr. Gnaegi) followed up with two concerns, specifically with regard to the process and timelines. He expressed doubt with regard to the DFID review, considering that since the Agency has yet to receive the Terms of Reference, it would be unlikely that the study could be completed by April, even in draft form. In addition, for the Working Groups, time may be a little short, and there is also a danger that the conclusions from these three different processes may contradict each other.

The DCG responded that given that this is a special meeting, and that this also refers into the Agency's informal donors meeting, the findings would have to be incorporated into the Agency's own regular planning meetings. She expressed the idea that the processes were intertwined and would be mutually reinforcing, given the close involvement by Agency staff (DER and Programme Departments) throughout.

The Representative from the European Commission (Mr. Jacques) mentioned that his understanding was that the Conference's conclusions were still open and that having pre-approved documents finalized before the work of the Working Groups have completed would be a little uncomfortable. He indicated that there must be room for meaningful conclusions to be brought in during the Conference itself.

The DCG asked whether for the EC, it would be preferable to have just a Chairman's Summary, and the Representative concurred that this would seem better.

The Representative from Norway and the Representative from the Netherlands voiced their preference for a crisp Chairman's Summary that would obviate the need for a pre-approved Declaration.

The DCG then asked Representatives if anyone was in fact, in favour of a Declaration, and the Representative of Jordan said that a declaration would better suit the objectives of the Conference and provide more formality and authority to its recommendations. She suggested that a Chairman's Summary might appear too informal. The Representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization supported the idea of a Declaration, and affirmed

that the Declaration would speak to the refugees, to the media and the broader public. It should be done in a democratic way, he suggested, and supported having the Secretariat produce a draft to be passed to delegates for their review and comment.

The Representative from ECHO suggested that there may be consensus on having a Declaration but there are questions on how to get to a text. Delegations in Geneva will not want a pre-cooked Declaration, but without an outline, or framework, it would be difficult to proceed.

The DCG responded that a Framework would be essential, and an initial draft would certainly be produced in advance to facilitate agreement. She also emphasized the need for flexibility in the process at this early stage, it would be worth taking a look at an initial document and see if a Declaration might be workable.

The Representative of the Netherlands asked the DCG to clarify whether the Chairman's Summary might be dropped. The DCG affirmed that there would be a Chairman's Summary in any event, but the Declaration was negotiable, should it prove to be problematic.

The Representative of the United States clarified her understanding that the Declaration serves the primary purpose of attracting higher level support for the Agency, while the Summary would be more detailed and technical. With this understanding the United States felt that the Declaration would serve an important purpose and would help to strengthen the mandate of UNRWA.

The Representative of the Netherlands asked for a clarification on the process going forward; DER noted his Department's role as Secretariat to the Conference and that the Secretariat would be the servant of the participants. To this end, the Secretariat, taking into account the deliberations just heard, will work on a draft Declaration, and share it informally with representatives to gauge initial reactions to the key messages.

With regard to the Chairman's Summary, the Secretariat will work closely with the Swiss and help them in drafting the content of the Chairman's Summary at the time of the Conference. DER reminded participants that unlike the Declaration, the Chairman's Summary would be issued by the Chair, under his own authority.

ACTION ITEM 7: DER to prepare draft of a Declaration for the purposes of consulting participants.

5. Substantive Preparatory Process

DER summarized the progress to date in constituting the Working Groups. Given the holidays and related absences, it has been difficult to finalize assignments, nevertheless, DER noted with pleasure that many delegations had approached him with offers to support preparations, and apologized that a final list was not yet ready for distribution. DER added that the Secretariat was working on external resource experts, individuals or organizations to help prepare background documents for the Working Group sessions.

DER encouraged delegates to recommend individuals and groups that have previous experience in the region and who might be able to support the work of the groups. He noted that a budget was available to fund these external resources, and that in addition, an External Relations officer would be assigned to each group to provide the linkage between the work of the Group, the Secretariat, the Field Offices and the Programme Departments.

DER summarized the current assignments, noting that the Secretariat has about 75% of the assignments completed:

- Community Development: Jordan (Chair) Vice-Chair (TBD)

- Support from Field Offices, Relief and Social Services Department
- Children and Youth: Sweden (Chair) UNICEF (Vice-Chair)
 - Support from Education Department, Relief and Social Services Department
- Resource Mobilization: PLO (Chair) Vice-Chair TBD
 - Support from DER and Front Office
- Economic Empowerment: TBD
 - Support from Microfinance, Education Departments

DER then asked the Chairs of three of the groups to offer their preliminary overview of preparations.

The Representative from Jordan said that preparations had begun but given the holidays, it was difficult to finalize the composition of the group. She provided a brief expression of Jordan's goals for the Working Group indicating that the Group would consider physical and social infrastructure issues, including housing and environment, and looked forward to participation from Core Group members. In addition, she noted that preliminary discussion had taken place with UNRWA, and that they were finalizing options for external support. *She also noted that the three host countries had discussed the matter of Community Development at the last meeting of the Arab League.*

The Representative from the Palestine Liberation Organization noted that in preparing the theme of resource mobilization, it would be important to consider the way we approach refugees, that is to say that refugees should not be seen simply as recipients, but also as a resource. He encouraged the view that refugees be viewed as partners in the entire work of UNRWA. Identifying the refugees' needs would be a critical part of this exercise, and their involvement in setting priorities would need to be considered. With this in mind, the Representative suggested that there is a need for Host countries, the donors and the PLO to try and get out to communicate with the refugees, and there would be a need for refugees themselves to prepare and develop papers as a reference for this Group.

The Representative from Sweden (Ms. Mawe) noted that her delegation had held preliminary meetings with UNICEF, UNESCO and UNRWA, and had delivered a draft outline for the workshop including four presentations or discussions, and that they had envisaged commissioning one paper per workshop. She noted that they have attached a full resource person in Stockholm to the Working Group, and this resource is already working on a paper to provide some background and recommendations for the entire workshop. She suggested that the first meeting of the Working Group would likely be held in the first or second week of February, likely in Amman.

The Representative of SDC (Mr. Gnaegi) suggested that given that the Working Groups were still in their preliminary stages, it was most important to put together some sort of timeline to facilitate the process and to aid Chairs of the Working Groups to complete their work in time.

ACTION ITEM 8: DER to produce a timeline with specific dates to clarify deadlines for Working Groups and other important inputs.

The Representative of SDC (Mr. Froehlich) suggested that once all the positions for the Working Groups are assigned, then a small meeting with Secretariat officials should be convened to walk through the timeline and ensure that the appropriate inter-linkages and synergies exist without duplication. This meeting would help to ensure that the Chairs are aware of all deadlines.

DER mentioned again that once all assignment were made and the work had started, the External Relations Officers and Programme staff would be tasked to ensure that information flows between the groups. He suggested that there would be healthy overlap where it made sense, but that duplication in themes would be

avoided. The DCG referred to the development of the website with key documents, and suggested that this would greatly facilitate information exchange, as documents for all the groups would be posted here.

The Representative from Jordan asked the Secretariat to share the invitation list for each Working Group. DER responded that the Groups were open to all delegations and he encouraged the Core Group to attend all the groups that they had an interest in. Once the Groups had been crystallized, participant lists can be circulated or posted to the site.

The Representative of the United States asked about the assignation of a Chair for the last group, DER responded that we had put out an offer to one of the delegations and that he was awaiting a response from the capital.

The Representative of the European Commission (Jacques) clarified the EC's position, and reaffirmed their intention to play a leadership role in one of the Working Groups. Recognizing that as a major donor to the Agency, management concerns are a significant concern, he underlined the importance of transparency in the process of assigning responsibilities. The DCG apologized if there was any perception of lack of clarity, and affirmed that it was the Agency's goal to proceed in the most transparent manner possible. DER noted that in his intervention explaining the roles that had been taken up, he did not mention some assignments that were still tentative pending instructions from capitals. In the interests of transparency, he reported on the countries that had been approached but which had received instructions that they could not participate in a leadership role at this time. He also reported on those countries that he had approached but whom were still awaiting instructions. The Representative of the EC (Jacques) thanked the Secretariat and recognized that this was a difficult process.

6. Any Other Business:

The DCG set the date of the next Steering Committee as February 10, 2004 in Amman. She set the next Core Group Meeting for February 25th, 2004. She notified delegates of DERs intention to brief Geneva Missions on February 23, 2004, and reminded delegates that the Secretariat would be alerting them of the date for the joint press conference and signing ceremony, officially launching the Conference.

DER circulated a list of the participants that have been notified to date.

DCG thanked everyone for the input and concluded the Meeting.

Annex I: List of Participants

**List of Participants
Core Group Meeting on Geneva Conference
13 January 2004
Amman**

Canada Ms. Monika Vadeboncoeur
First Secretary & Head of Development Section
Embassy of Canada
Amman

EC Mr. Philippe Jacques
First Secretary
European Commission
Jerusalem

ECHO Mr. Robert Watkins
Head
ECHO Regional Office
Amman

Ireland

Italy

Jordan Ms. Mona Darwaza
Director of Research
Department of Palestine Affairs (DPA)
Amman

Mr. Yasin Abu Awwad
Director of Planning and Projects
Department of Palestine Affairs (DPA)
Amman

Netherlands Ms. Jeannette Seppen
Deputy Head
Representative Office of the Netherlands
Ramallah

Norway Mr. Paul Monnory
Consultant for the Representative Office of Norway
Jerusalem

PLO Mr. Saji Salameh
Director General, Refugee Affairs Department
Ramallah

Mr. Mohammad Abu Baker
Director
Department of Refugee Affairs
Amman

Sweden Ms. Ann Mawe
Consul (Political Affairs)
Consulate General of Sweden
Jerusalem

Ms. Ann-Sofie Nilson
First Secretary
Embassy of Sweden
Amman

Switzerland Mr. Fritz Froehlich
Deputy Head, Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation
Jerusalem

Mr. Adrian Gnaegi
Head, Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation
Amman

UK Mr. Mohammad Barakat
Programme Officer
DFID
British Consulate
Jerusalem

United States Ms. Joan Polaschik
First Secretary for Refugee Affairs
Embassy of the US
Amman

Annex II: Summary of Action Items

Item	Action to be taken	Responsible	Deadline
1	Work with SDC to organize launch event, advise Core Group of dates and other relevant details	DER	Jan. 21
2	Send notifications to host countries and key agencies and organizations	DER	Jan. 19
3	Send formal invitations to all participants	DER	End January
4	Comment on Rules of Procedure and Aide Memoire	Core Group	Jan. 23
5	Set up site for information exchange	DPI	End January
6	Circulate Medium Term Plan to Working Groups	DCG/DER	As soon as available (March)
7	Prepare draft declaration and consult with Core Group	DER	End January
8	Produce a timeline with specific dates to clarify deadlines	ERPO/SS	Jan. 16