

**Commissioner-General's opening Statement**  
**Advisory Commission Meeting**  
**Dead Sea, Jordan 17 November 2009**

**Distinguished Chair, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates:**

I am pleased to join you today at this regular session of UNRWA's Advisory Commission. I extend a special welcome to the new Chairperson, His Excellency Ambassador Amr Abu Al-Atta of Egypt and the new Vice-Chairperson, His Excellency Ambassador Fahd bin Abdul-Muhsin Al Zeid of Saudi Arabia. I wish both of you success in leading the work of this important Commission.

I also warmly welcome those distinguished delegation heads joining us for the first time from Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and the United States.

Today's session is my last as Commissioner-General. I retire at the end of this year, having served UNRWA and Palestine refugees since August 2000, initially as Deputy Commissioner-General and from 2005 as Commissioner-General. One achievement from which we must all take pride is the reform of this Commission over the past five years. By expanding its membership, reorganizing its structures and revamping its procedures, we have brought into being an energized and effective body whose contribution to UNRWA's governance continues to evolve in positive directions.

Even more significant than the organizational re-arrangements are the candid engagement, genuine consultation and mutual respect which have become the currency of this Commission's discourse. These attributes have helped to cultivate a climate of shared trust, greatly enhancing the scope and value of your advice and guidance. Within that climate, this

Commission has offered excellent support to UNRWA's responses to the many crises and challenges we have confronted during my term of office, notably in the occupied Palestinian territory and Lebanon.

Your commitment and approach have enabled you to play a leading role in transforming UNRWA through its management reform process, revitalized resource mobilization efforts and the development of our Medium Term Strategy. With our common interest in addressing Palestine refugee needs as our unifying cause, we have striven together to make the Advisory Commission an example of a successful partnership. We will return to the subject of partnership in the Hosts and Donors meeting over the coming two days. I express sincere thanks to you all and hope that in the interest of Palestine refugees and UNRWA, this Commission and its work continues to grow from strength to strength.

Our substantive agenda begins with an update on activities, past and future, commemorating our 60th anniversary. The update will cover events held in New York during September – events which focused attention on the continuing relevance of UNRWA's work, reaffirming the mutual interests and shared responsibilities on which our endeavors are based. We were buoyed by the expressions of support from many quarters – States, intergovernmental organizations and leading figures from the worlds of business, culture and the arts. We were also heartened by the statements of global concern for the situation of Palestine refugees and by the respect and regard voiced for UNRWA's humanitarian and human development work.

I express my appreciation to all delegations who helped make the event in New York such a resounding success. We were particularly gratified by the support conveyed through the active participation of the UN Secretary-General, President Mahmoud Abbas, Queen Rania of Jordan and a significant number of heads of state and ministers, including the Foreign Minister of Jordan who will be with us tomorrow. I hope this support will

be reflected not only in enhanced levels of support for UNRWA, including more generous contributions to our General Fund, but also in a re-doubling of efforts to address the issues underlying the situation of Palestinians and Palestine refugees.

The agenda item on UNRWA's financial situation is, as always, of pressing importance. As you will hear from the Deputy Commissioner-General, Filippo Grandi, the funding deficit in our General Fund remains a cause for grave concern at present and for the next biennium. Despite the generosity of most of our donors, to whom we are profoundly grateful, we currently face a shortfall of \$7.3 million against our operational budget for 2009. This is the minimum we need to pay the salaries of our staff and to cover our running costs up to year's end. In addition, we have a funding gap in our approved regular budget in the amount of \$84 million and a projected budget deficit of 140 million for 2010.

UNRWA's weak financial situation hinders our ability to discharge our responsibilities to the standards Palestine refugees deserve. We are restricted in our ability to plan and deliver quality services and efforts to improve the quality of UNRWA services are paralyzed. The circumstances of austerity generate anxiety among refugee communities and among our staff, as a result of which relationships with our staff unions are tense. Our lack of funds prevents us from responding favorably to staff's legitimate demands for salary increases to cope with rises in the cost of living.

As I prepare to retire, UNRWA's financial prospects are my most worrying preoccupation. I urge you to do whatever you can, individually and collectively, to help us place UNRWA's finances on a sound, predictable footing.

I ask you to support the proposals in a recent report from the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, following extraordinary meetings of the Group in May and June. The Working Group requests the Secretary-General to commission a report on ways to strengthen the management capacity of UNRWA, and proposes that the Fifth Committee reconsider the nature and level of funding provided to UNRWA from the UN regular budget.

Our standing agenda item on Organizational Development will allow us to review our reform achievements and to look ahead to the coming years. I am confident that in the period to come, UNRWA, with your support and assistance, will sustain the momentum of change. Filippo Grandi will present the concept paper on which our discussion will be based.

Among the many accomplishments of the organizational development process, one of the most tangible and far-reaching is the six-year Medium Term Strategy (MTS), which we are pleased to be launching officially today. Through a strategy-driven and results-based management approach to programme planning, implementation and assessment, the MTS will ensure that the work of each field office is informed by UNRWA's four strategic human development goals. These goals will be integrated into programmes, support services and budget processes. This is the path along which we plan to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in serving refugees, particularly those in the greatest need.

Distinguished Delegates,

Although critical, UNRWA's finances and maintaining the momentum of change are not our only concerns. The situation on the ground, notably in the occupied Palestinian territory, also remains deeply preoccupying. During the Hosts and Donors Meeting, you will hear from our field

directors about how these conditions affect UNRWA's work. Allow me to mention some of the most salient features here.

In Gaza, the blockade remains firmly in place, with all its adverse consequences for humanitarian access, for normal life and for the recovery and reconstruction effort. As always in these situations, civilians with no affiliation to armed groups or political parties, bear the brunt. The number of 'abject poor' among refugees has tripled in the last year to 300,000. Stunted growth among children, a consequence of chronic malnutrition, is making an appearance. The psychological damage to both adults and children is immeasurable, and it is apparent that the indiscriminate effects of the blockade serve only to swell the ranks of militants and the radicalized.

Conditions in the West Bank are similarly dire. The web of physical obstacles - some 592 currently - restricts Palestinian social interaction and denies access to economic opportunities and to resources such as land and water. Settlement construction and settler violence, land confiscation, house demolitions and evictions (including in East Jerusalem) and other violations of human rights are rife.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory constrain UNRWA's protection, humanitarian and human development activities and make our operations more expensive at a time when our resources are severely limited.

In Lebanon, steps taken in recent years to improve refugee living conditions are yet to address the serious socio-economic hardships they endure. At the same time, the reconstruction of Nahr El Bared camp remains a pressing concern. Distinguished delegations, due shortly to visit the camp will observe first-hand the urgency of our mission. With

less than 30 percent of the financial requirements having been contributed so far, it is critical that donors respond to our \$328.4 million appeal.

In Jordan and Syria, Palestine refugees are fortunate to enjoy a climate of stability, and to benefit from access to government services. Yet, as in our other three fields, our human development work as well as the maintenance of UNRWA's facilities and infrastructure are hampered by the limited funding available to us.

Distinguished Delegates,

In spite of the bleak outlook for Palestine refugees, particularly those in the occupied Palestinian territory, I am convinced that justice and peace will prevail. I continue to believe that universal values enshrined in the UN Charter retain their potency and that one day they will find meaningful expression in the lives of Palestinians and Palestine refugees alike.

Until a just and lasting solution is agreed, UNRWA will do its utmost to contribute to the well-being of Palestine refugees, and by so doing, remain a force for regional stability. I leave confident in the knowledge that UNRWA is institutionally and managerially a more self-aware, modern, transparent, globally engaged and, therefore, a much stronger agency, better able to confront the challenges of tomorrow. I salute our staff, for it is through their hard work and passion for service that UNRWA is acknowledged as a trustworthy and proficient partner.

I also pay a special tribute to my management team. Their professionalism and commitment, despite our limited resources and the difficult conditions under which we work, are the mainstays of UNRWA's strength. I thank each and every one of them for their support, hard work and engagement in the many challenges we have encountered over the years in attempting to

**equip UNRWA to do its duty to protect and assist Palestine refugees, in line with current United Nations standards.**