

**Statement by UNRWA Commissioner-General
Hosts and Donors Meeting
Mövenpick Hotel, Dead Sea, 18 November 2009**

Thank you, Dr. Jaber, for your stimulating keynote address, speaking eloquently to our topic, from your wide and successful experience as a Palestinian entrepreneur.

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, friends and partners of UNRWA:

I warmly welcome each of you to UNRWA's 2009 Hosts and Donors Meeting. For some time now, it has been our custom each year to bring together States that since 1948 have been hosting Palestine refugees and donors who have provided UNRWA with financial and material support over these years. These are useful and productive opportunities to review our work and to consider the challenges in the coming period. In the past three years we have expanded our invitations to include sister UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and refugees.

In this, our sixtieth year, we considered it opportune to broaden further the scope and ambition of our end-of-year gathering. During the planning process, we bore in mind that the theme should be appropriate to our anniversary. We felt we should reflect significant aspects of UNRWA's operational approach over the years, including our relationship with Palestine refugees, while also representing a dynamic area for potential growth in the future.

The theme of "partnership" meets these criteria. As we convene under this banner, I trust that it will help focus our discussions and serve as a spur for creative thinking on how UNRWA might strengthen its relationships with a view to serving refugees better.

The word “partnership” evokes images of association, of cooperation and of enterprises jointly undertaken by diverse entities in pursuit of a common cause. The United Nations itself is founded on the premises of collective, multilateral measures and international cooperation. The idea of nations and peoples combining their strengths to accomplish shared goals lies at the heart of the *modus operandi* envisaged by the UN Charter. As UNRWA is a UN agency, a cooperative mode of functioning is an integral part of our constitution. General Assembly Resolution 302 which established UNRWA in 1949 requires the agency to carry out its mission “...in collaboration with... local governments”. [The resolution also contains references to agencies that were active in responding to the humanitarian emergency of 1948 and whose work would continue in tandem with UNRWA.]

Besides our grounding in cooperative UN practice and the stipulations of GA resolutions, two other factors drive UNRWA’s partnership impulse. One is our reliance on voluntary contributions. UN Headquarters in New York provides funding to cover only the costs of UNRWA’s 119 international staff, accounting for some 3.6% of our total funding needs. All other staffing, administrative, maintenance and operational expenses are financed through voluntary grants from States, government agencies and other funding bodies.

For years, UNRWA has faced persistent and serious budget deficits, which hamper our ability to discharge our mission effectively. The funding gap in our approved regular budget for 2009 amounts to \$84 million and we urgently require enhanced levels of giving from donors, if we are to face the coming years with confidence. While financial support is vital to UNRWA’s ability to function, we do not lose sight of the indispensable contributions of countries and communities that host refugees and the

sacrifices they make, often at great cost, to provide refuge to Palestine refugees, while supporting UNRWA's programmes in a variety of ways.

In this respect, our relationship with donors, host countries and the Palestinian Authority is one of our most valued partnership areas - one which plays out at all levels of our fields and programmes. Since 2005, we have reformed and revitalized UNRWA's Advisory Commission to become the central mechanism for managing and advancing that relationship. I take this opportunity to repeat what I said yesterday at the Advisory Commission meeting, expressing my appreciation for the excellent support and guidance the Commission continues to provide, and to pledge our commitment to building on these achievements.

Another factor underscoring our affinity for partnerships is the very nature of UNRWA's mission to assist and protect Palestine refugees. By definition, refugee issues transcend borders and engage the interests and responsibilities of multiple international actors. Our humanitarian and human development functions cut across sectors, demanding the harnessing of varied specializations and close coordination with host authorities who manage similar services for their nationals.

Each of UNRWA's principal activities - primary education, primary health care, relief and social services, microfinance, infrastructure and camp improvement and emergency and project management - constitute distinct areas of professional expertise. It is evident that maintaining partnerships with experts and other service providers is essential, if UNRWA is to be effective and achieve excellence in service delivery. Examples of partnerships in this vein include our relationship with UNESCO and WHO since 1950, and the role played by the ILO in helping to establish UNRWA's vocational education and training programme.

While our traditions of partnership are strong and long-standing, we are not content to rest on familiar ways of discharging our mission. The essence of our approach is to value and preserve the positive aspects of existing practice, while placing a premium on creativity and innovation. This spirit of self-improvement and constructive change is embodied in our organizational development process – a programme of comprehensive management reforms instituted in 2006. The “OD process” - as we refer to it for short - has given fresh impetus to UNRWA’s impulse for partnerships, stimulating our programme departments and field operations to explore new ways of strengthening existing relationships, while fostering new ones.

In this climate of transformation, we are seizing opportunities to reinforce UNRWA’s traditionally strong relationship with the Palestine refugees we serve. Over the past two years, the Schools of Excellence program in our Gaza Field Office has mobilized large sections of the local community to confront the challenges of low educational attainment and to address them by raising the standards of teaching and learning in UNRWA schools. The Neirab project in northern Syria, now in its second phase, followed a community-participation approach, encouraging the refugees themselves to contribute to decisions on how their new residences were planned, designed and built.

A similar method was taken further in developing the master plan for the reconstruction of Nahr El Bared in northern Lebanon. The community of refugees displaced from the camp was an integral part of the team drawing up the master plan. They continue to work with UNRWA and Lebanese authorities to implement the plan, including helping to establish joint security arrangements for the camp.

UNRWA's 2008 Programme and Project Cycle Management Handbook (another OD achievement) details measures for mainstreaming the involvement of refugees in the assessment of their needs as well as the planning, delivery and evaluation of our programmes. Much work will be required to put these into practice and to ensure that the examples I have cited become the norm across the Agency.

UNRWA's partnership with foundations and the private sector is an area we are yet to explore fully, although from our past experience with banks and companies, we have for some time been aware of the potential. This awareness has been sharpened by several successful engagements with the private sector in the context of our UNRWA @ 60 activities. Of these, cooperation with ZAIN, Palmedia, Saatchi & Saatchi and Price Waterhouse & Coopers deserve special mention. These recent examples have fueled our enthusiasm to seek additional partnerships with the private sector and to explore the possibilities offered in resource mobilization, public information, advocacy, management support and other strategic areas.

UNRWA's Medium Term Strategy identifies partnerships as a key theme that will guide UNRWA's programmes and operations in the years to come. My message is that UNRWA is determined in its commitment to consolidate and enhance its relationships with Palestine refugees, host countries and authorities, national and international service providers, UN agencies, foundations and the private sector. We are firm in our conviction that partnerships are an essential, effective and mutually beneficial means of achieving the objective all of us share, namely to offer Palestine refugees sustainable, quality services until such time that their plight is justly resolved. UNRWA is reaching out - calling out - to each of you to join us as partners in our mission and to blend your strengths with ours in the service of Palestine refugees.

As you respond to UNRWA's call for enhanced partnerships, I ask you to bear in mind the extreme vulnerability of Palestine refugees and the extraordinarily harsh conditions under which they live. During the plenary session tomorrow, our Field Directors will update us on the current situation in their areas of operation. They will draw our attention to the fact that, given UNRWA's lack of funds, and in spite of the favorable socio-economic climate in Jordan and Syria, for which we remain grateful, deep poverty, dilapidated facilities and social exclusion are still the fate of many refugees.

From our Director in Lebanon, we shall hear about the wretched living conditions for most refugees there and our efforts to overcome the obstacles to the reconstruction of the Nahr El Bared refugee camp.

Our Directors in the West Bank and Gaza, will inform us about the effects of the occupation and hear about the continuing suffocation of the rights and freedoms of Palestinians and Palestine refugees beneath myriad restrictions and assaults on their dignity. Yet from all our fields, you will also hear about UNRWA's efforts, and those of the refugees themselves, to mitigate the harshness and gloom – efforts in which we seek your support and your partnership.

The fraught circumstances in which UNRWA and its partners are compelled to function remind us of the urgency of a negotiated resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees. I call on our partner States – donors, host countries Israel and others – to work toward alleviating and bringing to an end the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Distinguished colleagues:

We have prepared for the next day and a half a rich agenda in a format designed to maximize interaction and the open exchange of ideas. I encourage you to engage as fully as possible in the plenary sessions as well as in the group discussions. Your views are important to us, so let us hear them articulated and debated so that we can take them into account as we go forward.