

**Statement by Deputy Permanent Representative of Ireland, Mr. Jim Kelly, to the UNRWA Pledging Conference, 10 December 2008**

Ireland strongly supports the work of UNRWA and I am pleased to reiterate that support today. I wish to pay tribute to the leadership of Commissioner-General AbuZayd and to thank her colleagues for their work, often under difficult conditions, in bringing much-needed assistance to the Palestinian people. I also wish to thank Mr Andrew Whitley and his colleagues for their liaison role here in New York.

UNRWA faces growing challenges, as shown by the thirty per cent increase in those registering and eligible for services compared to more than a decade ago. It faces perhaps its greatest challenge in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially in Gaza, on which Commissioner-General AbuZayd expressed alarm when she addressed the Fourth Committee in October. Since then, the situation in Gaza has deteriorated significantly and it is important that we give UNRWA our full support in its important work on behalf of the people of Gaza. In that regard, Ireland will continue its support for UNRWA's education programme in Gaza in 2009.

This year marks a new chapter in Ireland's role in UNRWA, with the decision of the General Assembly in its resolution on Assistance to Palestinian Refugees, to invite Ireland, along with Finland, to become members of UNRWA's Advisory Committee. We look forward to working with other members of the Advisory Committee in support of UNRWA's work.

We welcome the progress achieved thus far with UNRWA's Organisational Development Process and we will be actively following this important issue in the Advisory Committee.

In conclusion, I am pleased to announce that Ireland intends to maintain our core funding for UNRWA in 2009 at €3.8M, equivalent to more than \$4.9M at current exchange rates. As indicated at the Vienna Conference on Nahr el Bared last June, €1 million of Ireland's contribution to UNRWA for 2009 will be earmarked for Lebanon and €250,000 of this specifically for the reconstruction of the Nahr el Bared Camp.

In addition, Ireland will continue its support for UNRWA's education programme in Gaza, with a further grant of €500,000 in 2009.

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