

Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

Wednesday, 2 December 2009, 11 a.m., Trusteeship Council Chamber

Mr. President,

UNRWA's work with and on behalf of Palestinian refugees over the last sixty years has been nothing short of remarkable. The anniversary commemoration this year has been an occasion to highlight the decades of service and achievements, but also serves as a poignant reminder that UNRWA was created as a temporary UN agency in 1949.

Throughout its existence, the Agency has very often had to operate in extremely difficult circumstances. Ireland wishes to acknowledge and pay tribute to the exemplary commitment and leadership of the Commissioner-General, Ms. Karen AbuZayd, over the past eight years.

The Agency is now experiencing one of the most challenging periods in its 60-year history. UNRWA has a critical role in responding to the grave humanitarian consequences of the conflict in Gaza and the blockade of the territory over the past two and a half years. UNRWA staff - many of whom are Palestinian refugees themselves - have shown extraordinary determination and courage in responding to the crisis.

It is imperative that the international community addresses the situation in which UNRWA is currently obliged to operate. Together with other member States of the European Union, Ireland has consistently called for the immediate and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza to allow for reconstruction and economic recovery.

Ireland has supported the work of UNRWA over many years, with our financial contribution since 2005 totalling €17.4 million. We were honoured to be appointed to UNRWA's Advisory Commission in 2008, and view the Commission as an important source of advice and support for the Agency in implementing its mandate.

Recognising the importance of core resources in enabling UNRWA to provide basic services to refugee communities, the majority of our contribution has been channelled to the UNRWA General Fund. With the Agency currently facing such unprecedented operational challenges, it is regrettable that its core budget remains chronically under-funded. Every effort must be made to ensure that UNRWA has the resources to deliver its essential mandate, and that these resources are deployed as effectively and efficiently as possible.

In view of UNRWA's difficult financial situation, Ireland was pleased to announce at the recent Advisory Commission meeting an additional pledge of €250,000 towards reducing UNRWA's deficit.

Mr. President,

Ireland underlines the importance of UNRWA's comprehensive Organisation Development process. We have been pleased to support, in particular, the ongoing review of UNRWA's education programming. We welcome the Discussion Paper "A Framework for Sustaining Change in UNRWA 2010-2015", presented last month at the Advisory Commission, and look forward to engaging on its content. In these difficult financial and economic times, it is more important than ever to maintain the momentum for reform and organisational change, so as to deliver tangible benefits for Palestinian refugees.

While I am not in a position to announce our specific 2010 commitment today, I want to underline that UNRWA will remain a funding priority for the Irish Government. As the Agency continues its tireless work to serve Palestinian refugee communities, it can be assured of Ireland's continued support. In 2010, as in recent years, we will focus our contributions on the General Fund, recognising the importance of core resources in the maintenance of basic services.

One day, in the context of a just and lasting peace, UNRWA's work will be done. Until then, support to UNRWA is not just a humanitarian imperative; it remains a critical expression of the solidarity of the international community with Palestinian refugees.

Thank you.