



Statement

by

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**at the
Fourth Committee**

**“United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
in the Near East”**

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We would like to thank the Commissioner General of UNRWA Mr. Filippo Grandi for his valuable introductory statement. We are also thankful for the reports under this item.

Mr. Grandi is not only a friend of the Palestine refugees, but also of every individual that understands the plight of refugees worldwide.

Lebanon aligns itself with the statement made by Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Madame Chairman,

Let me start by explaining what exactly it means to be a refugee. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, defines a refugee as a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...".

Now, if we consider the 5 services that UNRWA provides namely health, relief and social services, education, microfinance, and camp improvement, we can reach the conclusion that a Palestinian refugee is a person who has been completely devoid of all his human rights and his capability to serve himself and his community.

This is the story of the Palestine refugees over the years since the "Nakba" of 1948. It is that of a people uprooted from their homeland, out of fear for their lives at the hands of Israeli terror gangs and fear of prosecution, among other things, only because of their identity.

This is the harsh reality that we should never forget; it is the reality that we should comprehensively resolve. Focusing on the services and the budgetary shortages of UNRWA is rightfully an important concern, but our primary goal must remain the "right of the refugees to return".

Madame Chairman,

Lebanon fully supports the important work that UNRWA undertakes in the service and easing the suffering of about 5 million Palestine refugees. UNRWA has served as a reminder of the humanitarian plight of the refugees, and as a platform that has maintained the focus on their right of return.

UNRWA remains the principal source of basic services for the Palestine refugees, and thus, pending their return, the commitment of the international community to them through UNRWA is critical. We fully appreciate the long-term support by major donors for UNRWA, and welcome those who have recently committed to do so.

However, we urge the donor community as a whole to mobilize the needed resources, particularly for the Agency's General Fund. We also urge the General Assembly to consider additional financing for UNRWA from assessed contributions.

The financial shortfalls of UNRWA are only exacerbated by illegal Israeli port and related transit charges on its shipments entering the Gaza Strip. These charges are in fact taxes levied by Israel in violation of the 1946 "Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations". In addition, the Israeli blockade of Gaza and the requirement to palletize all container shipments contributed to increased expenditure for UNRWA in the form of charges for storage, demurrage, transportation and palletization.

Madame Chairman,

In Gaza, Israel continues to impose its illegal and immoral blockade. A blockade that is obstructing the freedom of movement of persons, including that of UNRWA staff, and the arrival of UNRWA supplies, such as building materials. Without these building materials refugee camps in Gaza and UNRWA schools will remain destroyed. Such Israeli policies are in violation of the 1967 "Comay - Michelmore" agreement between UNRWA and Israel, and international humanitarian law.

This blockade, which punishes more than a million and a half Palestinians, mostly refugees, must end. Easing the blockade and not lifting it completely, is unacceptable and remains a clear violation of the responsibilities of the occupying power.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Israeli occupation and its associated regime of closures, house demolitions, land confiscation, settlement activities, and the racist separation wall, continue to have an adverse effect on the Palestine refugees, limiting their access to UNRWA services and resources.

Madame Chairman,

Lebanon as a host country of about 400,000 Palestinian brothers and as a member of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, is aware of the difficult reality the refugees are faced with. Uprooted from their homes and living in highly dense camps, it is the responsibility of the international community to create healthy and decent living conditions for them in their interim locations.

UNRWA remains the partner of the Lebanese Government in providing for the just needs of the Palestine refugees in 12 camps and 16 gatherings spread across Lebanon.

The Lebanese Government with its limited resources spares no effort to improve the living conditions of the Palestine refugees. We acknowledge that more should be done, as no excuses are accepted when it comes to suffering that can be avoided.

In recent years, Lebanon eased restrictions on the refugees to enter the labor markets, and in August 2010 the Lebanese Parliament passed amendments to the “employment legislation” granting additional employment rights to the Palestine refugees.

Lebanon highly appreciates the work of UNRWA in the reconstruction of the “Nahr El-Bared Camp”, and welcomes the completion of its first phase. Lebanon expresses its sincere thanks to all donors that have pledged support for the reconstruction of the Camp, and calls on them to continue honoring their commitments.

Madame Chairman,

The plight of the Palestine refugees is a political issue and not just a humanitarian concern. Israel is fully responsible for all the suffering of the Palestine refugees; Israel should fully respect their right of return, as an inevitable step on the road to a just peace.

For its part, the international community is politically responsible for resolving the issue of the refugees, by holding Israel accountable to its obligations under international law including humanitarian law and human rights law.

Thank you.