



Statement

by

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Deputy Permanent Representative of Lebanon
to the United Nations**

**at the
Fourth Committee**

**Item 49: "United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
in the Near East (UNRWA)"**

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Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank the Commissioner-General Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl for his briefing and commend the women and men working for UNRWA in the Headquarter and in the field.

As world leaders deepened their commitments to address the unprecedented large movement of refugees and migrants during high level meetings held last September in the General Assembly and Security Council; one of the largest and oldest protracted conflict and refugee case in modern History of the Middle East should not be forgotten nor left behind: 5,2 million of Palestine refugees, accounting for more than 40% of long term refugees worldwide. Those refugees are scattered in the occupied State of Palestine and neighboring host countries, and are facing political, social, and economic uncertainties. Nevertheless, UNRWA remains a stabilizing factor for those refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

Indeed, and for more than six decades, thousands upon thousands of Palestine refugees have benefitted from services provided by UNRWA: From education, primary health care, relief and social services, to infrastructure and camp improvement. But UNRWA's core existence and its ability to deliver its services are jeopardized by the chronic shortfall in funds in its core budget program. This dire financial situation is exacerbated by tightened measures and restrictions imposed by Israel, impacting the quality of services provided by the agency to the 1.3 million refugees under siege in Gaza and to the 800000 living in the West Bank as clearly mentioned in the report under discussion.

Furthermore, the international community should ensure the financial stability of UNRWA's budget and increase the predictability of its resources which will strengthen the agency's services provided to those refugees and to restore their trust in the agency. Indeed, the President of the Council of ministers of Lebanon has raised this issue be it during bilateral meetings with his counterparts or in letters addressed to donors and concerned countries. Moreover, Lebanon stands ready to continue to work constructively with partners to ensure sound financial budget enabling UNRWA from fulfilling its mandate.

Only a strong and reliable agency will enhance resilience of Palestine refugees pending the efforts by International Community will yield in achieving just and durable peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Chairman,

Turning to my country, Lebanon is hosting more than 400000 Palestine refugees and 30000 Palestine refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria. This represents almost 10% of its population added to the already sobering number of Syrian refugees amounting to 1,2 registered with UNHCR. Those refugees continue to face multiple challenges: From lack of financial resources to minimal health services and interruption of other primary service provided by UNRWA, and overcrowding of the 12 densely populated refugee camps, to the erosion of hope in relaunching a credible peace process which will safeguard the two state solution.

Lebanon has been witnessing the severe impact on the Palestine refugees and their host communities due to the decline and severe reduction in the services provided by UNRWA resulting from continued structural and chronic financial shortfalls facing the agency. In this context, the Lebanese competent authorities had been working and will continue to work closely with UNRWA to address the needs of those refugees in full compliance with Lebanon's constitution and legal framework.

Moreover, we would like to reaffirm that we have been working with the Palestinian representatives through the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee to address the socio-economic and security challenges. In a country where resettlement is contrary to the constitution, strides have been made, from the adoption of the law 129 regulating the access of Palestinians to the Lebanese labor market to the publication of the "Guide to the Palestinian workers, rights and obligations," to the vaccination campaign, to the improvement of education and strengthening of security measures. But the task remaining ahead of us is enormous, and we can not do it alone.

It is in this spirit that during the donors' conference in London held last February, the Lebanese delegation while presenting the priority areas for focused and immediate international support included the reconstruction of Nahr El Bared camp among urgent national infrastructure needs. Indeed, the completion of the reconstruction remains a priority to my Government as well as to the Agency.

We would like to reiterate our appreciation for the generosity of donors from Arab regional states, Germany and the latest being the EU with a donation of 12 million Euros on October 6, 2016, but we are still 120 million dollars short of the required amount while 12000 refugees remain displaced. The factors associated with such a prolonged displacement could destabilize our northern region. Moreover, the decreasing trend in the Nahr El-Bared relief services budget from 18.8 million in 2010 to 8.7 million in 2014, and is expected to be further reduced to 5.3 million, is of great concern to the refugees and to my Country. This trend should be reversed to meet the growing needs of those refugees.

Once again, we urge donors to fully cover UNRWA's appeal on the basic humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees fleeing the crisis in Syria which is \$414 million for the year 2016. It is alarming that only 37% of this flash appeal has been funded. We commend donors for their contributions and would like to exert them to continue to assist UNRWA.

Mr. Chairman,

In this era of global transition and multiple crisis, the words of Massioun Abu-Dhuhab 70 year old refugee from Palestine, and I quote " I wish I could go to smell the air of my country and die" (end of quote) should summon in the international community and in particular the Security Council the political will to do more to resume the peace process based on the well known parameters set by the Madrid principles, the Arab peace initiative and relevant UN resolutions in particular General Assembly resolution 194. For all the Massioun Abu Duhab in the occupied state of Palestine and host countries, we need to act and act now.