



Statement

by

**Mr. Hassan Abbas
Counsellor**

**at the
Fourth Committee**

**Item 53: “ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
in the Near East (UNRWA)”**

New York, November 6, 2017

Check Against Delivery

*Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations
866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 531, New York, NY 10017*

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I would like to thank the Commissioner-General for his useful and light shedding briefing, and to commend UNRWA's leadership and staff for their tireless work to deliver services and assistance to Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories and in neighboring host countries.

Since its establishment by the General Assembly in 1949, UNRWA has played a stabilizing role for more than 5.3 million Palestinian refugees within their host communities as it attempted to meet their essential needs through the provision of education and primary healthcare services, and acting as a social safety net for successive generations of Palestinians living in refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the occupied Palestinian territories.

This stabilizing role has been put under jeopardy in recent years due to the recurring financial deficits that the Agency's budget has found itself under year in year out (77.5 million dollars in 2017 for example), contrasted with the increasing need for its services by a demographically growing Palestinian refugee population. This dire situation is exacerbated by Israel's reprehensible actions in the occupied territories, from its unlawful siege of Gaza, to its repressive actions against the Palestinian population in the West Bank, negatively impacting the quality of services provided by the Agency to hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees in both areas.

As a host country, Lebanon is deeply concerned by the financial crisis that UNRWA has found itself under in past years. We share the view expressed by the Commissioner-General in his June report on the financial situation of the Agency, regarding the dire consequences that will face the refugees and their host countries if the unpredictable, un-sustained and insufficient funding of the Agency persists in coming years. As rightly reflected in the report, this could lead to reduced schooling, decreased access to preventative healthcare and vaccination, reduced life expectancy at birth, food insecurity and malnutrition, poverty, unemployment, an increased chance of involvement in dangerous behavior such as crime, substance abuse and violent extremism, and thus a significant additional insecurity for host countries.

The time has come for the international community to adequately address this recurring crisis. The Secretary General, in his report of 30 March 2017, presented a set of useful avenues that could be pursued to ensure the long term financial stability and predictability of support for UNRWA. We find many of the ideas presented in the report useful and worth pursuing.

Mr. Chairman,

Today, Lebanon is host to more than 400,000 Palestinian refugees who have themselves, or their parents and grandparents, fled Palestine as a result of the Israeli caused Nakba in 1948 or the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem in 1967, and who have been eagerly awaiting their return to their homeland ever since. Before the massive influx of more than 1.2 million Syrian refugees into Lebanon after 2011, Palestinian refugees represented around 10% of Lebanon's population.

They continue to face a complex set of economic, social, environmental and security challenges, compounded by the dire financial situation facing UNRWA, in addition to the lack of a political horizon to put an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine and, for most Palestinians, what appears to be a perpetual refugee reality.

Furthermore, the lack of necessary funds remains a major obstacle facing the finalization of the reconstruction project of Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in North Lebanon. 130 million dollars (30% of the total estimated costs) are still needed to complete the reconstruction process and allow the remaining 10,000 internally displaced Palestinian refugees to return to the camp. We urge the donor community to step up its support in this regard.

In the past few years, Lebanon, in spite of its limited capabilities, has taken measures, within the bounds of its constitutional and legal framework, to alleviate some of the challenges facing Palestinian refugees. In June 2005 the Lebanese Minister of Labor signed a decision to allow Palestinian refugees access to around 70 professions in the Lebanese labor market that were previously reserved exclusively for Lebanese nationals. That was followed in August 2010 by the Parliament's adoption of Law 129 that gave additional rights to Palestinian workers in Lebanon, including the right to a free work permit.

Finally Mr. Chairman,

Lebanon reiterates the importance of providing UNRWA with all the necessary international political and financial support that it needs to fulfill its mandate. Pending the achievement of a just solution in the Middle East that would end Israel's occupation of Arab lands, realize an independent and viable Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and allow for the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland, the international community has a collective responsibility to continue its support for UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees.

I thank you for your attention.