

## REMARKS BY UNRWA COMMISSIONER-GENERAL PHILIPPE LAZZARINI AT THE MINISTERIAL MEETING CO-HOSTED BY JORDAN AND SWEDEN ON THE MARGINS OF THE 79TH UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

26 September 2024

New York

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**Deputy Prime Minister of Jordan,**

**Foreign Minister of Sweden,**

**Secretary-General,**

**Dear Colleagues,**

As we gather here in New York, two million people are trapped in 10 percent of the Gaza Strip.

A place that horrifies even the most seasoned humanitarians.

A place international journalists cannot visit.

And yet, one million children live there.

Amid rivers of polio-carrying sewage.

In rubble infested with rodents and reptiles.

More than 600,000 of these children are out of school.

They have already lost two years of learning.

Palestinians are no strangers to loss.

But to be dispossessed from education – which has always been a source of tremendous pride – is new.

We cannot afford to lose an entire generation and sow the seeds for future hatred and extremism.

That is why UNRWA, beyond its lifesaving operations, resumed some learning activities in Gaza last month.

Every day, we provide psychosocial services to thousands of children.

We build on these activities to help them read, write, and do basic arithmetic.

We will do so until their right to education is restored.

**Excellencies,**

More than 41,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been reported killed.

Many of the hostages taken from Israel remain in captivity.

The occupied West Bank is gripped by escalating violence.

Long held fears of conflict spilling into Lebanon are being realized.

And yet, the international community continues to equivocate.

Seventy-five years ago, the General Assembly established UNRWA to provide, temporarily, public-like services for Palestine Refugees.

Absent a political solution, amid recurring conflict, and what the International Court of Justice has called an unlawful occupation, UNRWA has continued to deliver its mandate.

Today, the Agency is the beating heart of the humanitarian operation in Gaza.

Despite this – and perhaps because of it – UNRWA is under fierce attack.

**Excellencies,**

In Gaza, 222 UNRWA staff have been killed.

More than two-thirds of our buildings have been damaged or destroyed.

Our aid convoys are looted amid a collapse of civil order, and obstructed by Israeli soldiers defying their chain of command.

Disturbingly, senior Israeli officials have described destroying UNRWA as a war goal.

Draft legislation in the Israeli Knesset seeks to evict the Agency from East Jerusalem, revoke its privileges and immunities, and designate it as a terrorist organization.

An unconscionable action by a Member State against a UN entity mandated by the General Assembly.

Make no mistake, it is not only UNRWA that is under attack.

Across the occupied Palestinian territory, United Nations and international NGO staff are being phased out.

These efforts aim to strip Palestinians of their refugee status, and change, unilaterally, the parameters for a future political solution.

UNRWA also faces relentless allegations concerning breaches of neutrality.

We take substantiated allegations seriously and investigate them thoroughly.

In line with the Colonna recommendations, we are strengthening already robust systems for ensuring the neutrality of our staff and operations.

Our personnel are vetted against UN and other sanctions lists.

Our policy on Outside and Political Activities is at the forefront of efforts to prohibit behavior incompatible with serving as UN staff.

#### **Excellencies,**

I conclude with three appeals.

**First**, I urge you to safeguard UNRWA's role in Gaza.

A ceasefire is imperative, and the Agency is critical for ensuring a viable transition.

In the absence of a state, only UNRWA can fulfill the learning and healthcare needs of Palestine Refugees.

**Second**, the Agency requires a sustainable model of funding.

UNRWA's operations are only secure until the end of October, with a shortfall of 80 million dollars for 2024.

2025 remains highly uncertain with a significant funding suspension in place, and anticipated budget cuts in top donor countries.

**Finally**, we must reject attempts to tarnish UNRWA's reputation and end its operations.

These efforts do not only threaten Palestine Refugees.

They threaten the multilateral system.

They threaten a future political solution.

Your actions at this critical juncture will have repercussions for generations to come.

UNRWA is a formidable tool at your disposal – I urge you to use it wisely.

Thank you.