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for palestine refugees in the near east

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, MR. DENNIS FRANCIS, AT THE OPENING OF THE UNRWA PLEDGING CONFERENCE

12 July 2024



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President of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Dennis Francis, at the opening of the UNRWA pledging conference © UN NEWS

New York, 12 July 2024

Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen



As President of the General Assembly, I have consistently emphasized that the work and impact of the United Nations extends far beyond the physical borders of our planet, especially for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine refugees in the near east.

Our field offices save innumerable lives and work diligently to improve the quality of life for millions, giving them hope.

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Our United Nations system organizations provide shelter to displaced refugees, sustenance to the hungry, and education to children who would otherwise lack access to learning opportunities.

Since its establishment in 1949, UNRWA has embodied the best of our fieldwork for decades – earning a reputation as a beacon of hope in a region routinely beset by turmoil.

UNRWA provides **protection for 5.9 million registered refugees** – including vulnerable groups such as women, children, and persons with disabilities.

The agency **administers 58 recognized Palestine refugee camps** – addressing the dire **humanitarian needs of over 1.6 million people** across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Through its efforts, UNRWA offers hope – and, moreover, the prospect of a future where the dignity and rights of all Palestine refugees are protected and upheld.

Tragically, **197 UNWRA staff members have paid the ultimate price.**

To honor their memory, I kindly request this Assembly to rise and observe a moment of silence.

(PAUSE FOR A MINUTE OF SILENCE)

Thank you!!

Excellencies,

Considering the essential services delivered by the Agency and its staff, it should deeply alarm us all that UNRWA is currently standing on the precipice of financial collapse.

We must heed Commissioner-General Lazzarini's persistent warnings – reiterated over the past many months – that the budgetary shortfalls facing the organization could force it to cease operations this year, despite its mandate extending to June 2026.

The crisis facing UNWRA has been exacerbated by increasingly persistent attacks on the Agency's reputation and integrity.

Yet – if it ceases operations – it is vulnerable Palestine refugees, who have nowhere else to turn, who will suffer the most.



Consider that UNRWA's emergency appeals are critically underfunded – only 18.19% of the United Nations relief and works agency (en)

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September funding will only cover food supplies for Gazans until the end of

September (search/google)

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Throughout this session, we have convened multiple times to address the acute situation affecting UNRWA.

In March, the General Assembly held an informal plenary to receive a briefing from Commissioner-General Lazzarini on the agency's operations.

A number of Permanent Representatives actively participated in the morning *Gayap Dialogues* which I convened to shine a spotlight on this disturbing situation.

These efforts have aimed at building political support for UNRWA.

Today, however, we must match our political commitment with substantial financial contributions.

As custodian of UNRWA's mandate, I firmly believe that the General Assembly has a duty to ensure that the agency, its staff, and the millions of refugees it serves receive adequate and enduring support – both political and financial, in order to empower it to discharge its mandate.

Excellencies,

UNRWA is no stranger to crisis.

Throughout its history, it has often operated amidst armed conflict.

However, the current levels of death and destruction in the Gaza Strip are on an unprecedented scale.

At least 38,000 Palestinians have been killed, and over 85,000 are injured.

More than 90 percent of the Gaza Strip's population is displaced – with nowhere safe to turn.

The territory is grappling with severe acute food insecurity – with **half a million people on the brink of famine.**

In an age of such food wastage, the mere existence of a famine – especially one that is human-caused and conflict-induced – is unconscionable and inexcusable.

UNRWA has continued to operate throughout this turmoil, albeit at a severely limited capacity.

Its shelters have been hit, its schools destroyed, and its healthcare facilities severely impacted.

Yet, UNRWA and its staff has courageously persevered – delivering basic and lifesaving assistance and support to the increasingly desperate people of the Gaza Strip.



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in these extraordinary times, where UNRWA's very existence is in jeopardy,

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we must acknowledge that this Pledging Conference cannot proceed

on a basis of "business as usual."

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Therefore, I address the global public directly:

Now, more than ever, UNRWA needs your support.

Philanthropic organizations, private sector, and individuals – you all have the collective power to dig deeper into your pockets and make a profound difference in the lives of millions, by contributing directly to UNRWA.

I strongly urge you to act – and do so with utmost urgency.

This year must be different.

Humanitarian needs are escalating – and our actions must rise to meet them.

We must transform rhetoric into reality – ensuring that UNRWA stands on a stable financial footing.

And we must relentlessly **pursue peace in the region** and end the violence in the Gaza Strip.

Dear Colleagues,

I unreservedly reiterate the demands of the international community – as expressed through the General Assembly in its Emergency Special Sessions – which include:

- An immediate and lasting humanitarian ceasefire.
- Adherence to international law by all parties.
- Facilitation of immediate humanitarian access, including the lifting of restrictions placed on humanitarian actors by Israel.
- The unconditional and immediate release of all hostages.

I call on all those with leverage over the parties to exert their influence to achieve these aims.

Ultimately, a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in the Middle East – through the two-State solution – must be realized.

As the President of the General Assembly, I reiterate my unwavering commitment to support any and all efforts to this end.

Excellencies,

Dear Friends,



United Nations Relief and Works Agency (/en)

I am urging – not only Member States of this Assembly – but all other

holders I addressed an open message this week, **DONATE**

philanthropic organizations, the private sector and individuals. **(HTTPS://DONATE.UNRWA.ORG/-LANDING-PAGE/EN_EN)**

This is not merely about funding, nor about the survival of an Agency.

It is about **people** and the survival of Palestine refugees – especially the children – across the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

Together, we must forge a sustainable path forward – that honors our shared humanity, conscience and collective mandate to deliver both on our humanitarian obligations and indeed, on our human imperatives to help and to heal.

I thank you.

Background Information:

UNRWA (<https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.unrwa.org%2F&data=05%7C01%7CHQ-PIO%40UNRWA.ORG%7C7edfcbc8399c400e4a6c08dafba2254d%7C262f6a4120e941408d3efdf>) the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The United Nations General Assembly established UNRWA in 1949 with a mandate to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to registered Palestine refugees in the Agency's area of operations pending a just and lasting solution to their plight.

UNRWA operates in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, The Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Tens of thousands of Palestine refugees who lost their homes and livelihoods due to the 1948 conflict continue to be displaced and in need of support, nearly 75 years on.

UNRWA helps Palestine Refugees achieve their full potential in human development through quality services it provides in education, health care, relief and social services, protection, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance, and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.

Your support is crucial to help us provide emergency aid (<https://bit.ly/3rXMZ0P>) to displaced families in Gaza (<https://bit.ly/3rXMZ0P>)

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