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## STATEMENT BY UNRWA COMMISSIONER-GENERAL PHILIPPE LAZZARINI AT THE SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE

24 September 2024



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

### New York

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**Mr. Chair,**

**Excellencies,**

We have gathered here to shape our collective future.

We do so amid seismic geopolitical shifts that are fiercely testing the international institutions and instruments we have relied on for three-quarters of a century.

We have an opportunity to reaffirm the values and principles that have served us well, and to pursue meaningful reform where needed.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees – UNRWA – confronts daily the challenges this Summit seeks to address.

For 75 years, UNRWA has provided human development services for generations of Palestine Refugees in the occupied Palestinian territory, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

Millions of children have been educated in our schools, which equip them with the values, knowledge and skills they need to thrive.

Our education programme has reached gender parity and teaches values of human rights and tolerance.

UNRWA's educational outcomes are among the best in the region and at the lowest cost per student.

Our health programme provides primary healthcare to millions, achieving universal vaccination in Palestine Refugee communities.

Today, however, our decades-long investment in the future of Palestine Refugees is at risk.

**Excellencies,**

The blatant disregard for international humanitarian law in Gaza should alarm us all.

The scale of human suffering is immense and our ability to respond is severely constrained.

222 UNRWA staff have been killed.

Two-thirds of our buildings have been damaged and destroyed, killing hundreds of people seeking United Nations protection.

Legislative efforts are underway to evict UNRWA from East Jerusalem, remove its privileges and immunities, and designate it as a terrorist organisation.

Failing to push back against violations of international law; and failing to push back against efforts to intimidate and undermine the United Nations, sets a dangerous precedent.

It will compromise the future of humanitarian work and erode the rule of law.

**Excellencies,**

The international response to the war in Gaza; escalating violence in the West Bank; and the spillover of conflict into Lebanon and across the region, is highly concerning.

International law is implemented selectively or not at all, reinforcing perceptions of inequality and injustice.

Dehumanization is rampant in public discourse.

All this undermines the goals of this Summit to reaffirm our commitment to the United Nations Charter and international law, and build a multilateral system that delivers for everyone, everywhere.

Recommitting to the international rules-based order requires reinforcing its institutions and instruments so that they are fit for purpose and fit for the future.

Thank you.