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## THE SECRETARY-GENERAL REMARKS AT HIGH-LEVEL MINISTERIAL MEETING IN SUPPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (UNRWA)

27 September 2024

New York,

[as delivered]

Excellencies, Distinguished guests,

I thank the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Sweden for co-chairing this gathering and for their continued leadership in the support for UNRWA. I also thank all of you here today for your solidarity with Palestine Refugees.

When we met one year ago, I spoke about putting ourselves in the shoes of Palestinians in Gaza. Of imagining what life must be like.

I ended my remarks one year ago by saying *“This is the most dramatic humanitarian problem associated with the riskiest explosive potential.”*

This was just days before the horrors of October 7<sup>th</sup>.

Now, almost one year since that day, the situation for Palestinians in Gaza is beyond imagination.

It has been said that *“The United Nations was not created to bring us to heaven, but to save us from hell.”*

Unfortunately, neither the United Nations nor anyone else that might have the power to do it was able to save the people of Gaza from hell.

We have failed the people of Gaza.

They are in a living hell that somehow gets even worse by the day.

Over 41,000 people have been reported killed and more than 90,000 wounded, many with life-changing and lifelong injuries. The majority are women and children.

Two million Palestinians are now crammed into a space the size of the Shanghai International Airport. Existing – not living, but existing – among lakes of sewage, piles of rubbish and mountains of rubble.

The only certainty they have is that tomorrow will be worse.

Yet if there is any outpost of hope in this hellscape, it is UNRWA.

Even though UNRWA – as we all know – has not been spared.

On the human level - 222 UNRWA colleagues have been killed, many together with entire families, several in the line of duty. This is the highest death toll in UN history.

I ask you – all of you – to think for a moment in the different entities that you preside [over], or to which you belong, what would be the impact if 222 members would have been killed and even after that having to go with their duties to save the people of Palestine.

UNRWA personnel have been attacked repeatedly while going about their work. Women and men are displaced, shot at, and subjected to violent protests, detained by Israeli security forces, reporting mistreatment and torture.

UNRWA has not been spared on the operational level - the humanitarian response in Gaza is being strangled.

Protection and deconfliction mechanisms for humanitarian aid deliveries have failed. Attempts to evict UNRWA from its headquarters in East Jerusalem continue.

And UNRWA has not been spared on the political level. This includes systematic disinformation campaigns that discredit the agency's lifelong work.

Meanwhile draft legislation in the Israeli parliament seeks to label the Agency a terrorist organization and to make any activity by UNRWA on Israeli territory illegal.

In the face of the catastrophic conditions, UNRWA perseveres.

This is a tribute to the resilience of the women and men of UNRWA, and a tribute to your support.

Excellencies,

I have full confidence in UNRWA's continued commitment to upholding the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and humanity and to implement the recommendations of the Independent Review by Catherine Colonna.

Member States are showing that same confidence.

Virtually all donors have reversed their funding suspensions. 123 countries have signed up to the declaration on shared commitments to UNRWA.

This underscores the consensus that UNRWA's role across the occupied West Bank and the region is vital.

Friends,

There is no alternative to UNRWA.

Now is the time to work on all fronts to intensify support for the agency's vital mission.

Support with funding that is sufficient, predictable and flexible.

Of course, we all know that UNRWA is not a sustainable long-term solution to the plight of Palestine Refugees. It was never meant to be.

That is why we keep pressing for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages and a long-term political solution ending the occupation and leading to 2 states living side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capital.

But until that moment, UNRWA remains indispensable.

I urge your full support.

Help us to save UNRWA as it works to save and serve Palestine refugees.

Thank you.

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