

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
REMARKS TO UNRWA PLEDGING CONFERENCE
New York, 25 June 2019
[as delivered]

I am pleased to join you again for this year's pledging conference for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

When we gathered last year at this meeting, we feared the worst – UNRWA schools not opening, food for refugees running out, clinics closing.

Fortunately, that did not happen because in 2018 many of you stepped up to assert that Palestine refugees deserved the assistance, dignity and hope that UNRWA provides.

You spoke forcefully of how supporting UNRWA meant maintaining regional stability, protecting humanitarian space and preserving global solidarity regarding one of the world's most difficult situations.

And together, through your generosity and UNRWA's hard work, we lived up to the United Nations values of supporting those in need and leaving no one behind.

For nearly seven decades, UNRWA has faithfully and effectively fulfilled its mandate to assist Palestine refugees until a just and lasting solution is found.

It is tragic that a political solution has not yet been reached that satisfies the needs and aspirations of both Palestinians and Israelis.

I reiterate the importance of continuing to pursue peace efforts to realise the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

In the meantime, the continued work of UNRWA should be viewed not only as our common responsibility, but as our common success.

Millions of children have benefitted from an UNRWA education.

When I visited UNRWA schools in Gaza and Jordan, I was struck by the positive energy and attitudes of the children, who learn UN values of human rights and tolerance, and who want to be positive citizens of this world.

At this meeting today, you will hear yourself from two students, as the President of the General Assembly already mentioned, Hanan and Hatem, who represent UNRWA's student parliament in the West Bank and Gaza, and who practice democracy and conflict resolution every day in their work.

UNRWA's innovative health care services maintain high standards and are remarkably cost-effective.

Its emergency and social services address the fundamental needs of millions.

In Gaza alone, one million Palestine refugees depend on UNRWA for food.

If we are proud of these accomplishments, we need to support them in concrete ways.

UNRWA has maintained its operations through nearly half of 2019 thanks to generous contributions from Member States and others.

By the end of this month, however, UNRWA faces its first funding shortfall, which will continue to grow unless you act soon.

Let me stress that UNRWA has taken extraordinary reform and cost-control measures to reduce inefficient spending.

Over the past five years, UNRWA has saved \$500 million through these internal measures.

At the same time, it has diversified its donor base.

This includes significant efforts to ensure individual and institutional charitable funding.

In March, the Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation decided to launch an endowment fund for UNRWA at the Islamic Development Bank.

I applaud this decision that will contribute for UNRWA to count on solid and predictable financial support.

However, many of these new efforts will still take several years to show significant financial results.

Therefore, at the present moment, we still depend on Member States to provide the bulk of the funding.

Today, I humbly ask all donors to maintain their support for UNRWA at last year's level.

We know what is at risk: education for a half million children; 8 million health care visits a year; emergency relief for 1.5 million.

From our experience in 2018, we also know that it is possible to find the resources to keep UNRWA operational.

So today, given what is at stake at the human level, at the political and security level, and at the multilateral level, we must rise to the challenge and empower UNRWA to continue its important and impressive work.

Listen to the Palestine refugee students, Hanan and Hatem.

Their dreams and determination should be our inspiration.

Let us pledge today to keep them and their fellow UNRWA students in school through the year and well beyond.

They are the future and they deserve our support.

Thank you.