

Secretary-General's remarks to the Extraordinary Virtual Ministerial Pledging Conference: "A Strong UNRWA in a Challenging World - Mobilizing Collective Action"

23 June 2020

Let me begin by thanking our organizers, Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi of Jordan, and Minister for International Development Cooperation of Sweden, Peter Eriksson.

I also want to thank UNRWA's new Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini.

We are here together to mobilize political and financial support for the vital work of UNRWA.

The Agency is not only a lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees, but also critical for regional stability.

I want to thank you for the difference you are already making.

Your contributions are helping to ensure:

Education for more than half a million students;

Primary health care, with more than 8 million visits to UNRWA health facilities each year;

Food and cash assistance for about 1.8 million vulnerable Palestine refugees in Gaza;

And micro-finance opportunities for Palestine refugees to generate income.

Your support also enables UNRWA to safeguard and advance the rights of Palestine refugees under international law, including gender equality, child protection and the rights of persons with disabilities.

I have met with UNRWA students from Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. They have shared moving testimony of the difference your support is making in improving their lives and expanding their horizons of hope.

Every day, UNRWA is contributing to human development and stability in an increasingly volatile and challenging context.

And now, of course, there is a new test.

In recent weeks, and in close coordination with host authorities, UNRWA has responded to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among Palestine refugee communities, many of whom live in some of the highest-density conditions on earth.

We have seen extraordinary resourcefulness in adapting quickly to these unprecedented circumstances.

For example, UNRWA health and sanitation workers have continued to provide front-line support and the Agency has stepped up telemedicine efforts, expanded much needed cash assistance, and extended emergency education to more than 500,000 girls and boys.

Excellencies,

I fully understand the challenging financial circumstances faced on many fronts. But it is precisely in difficult times when our resolve is tested, that we must work even closer together.

For more than 70 years, UNRWA has provided crucial assistance to Palestine refugees. We share a collective responsibility to them until the realization of a just and viable political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Looking ahead, we must continue in the effort to make UNRWA funding sustainable, predictable and sufficient. This means addressing the chronic funding shortfalls and persistent cash flow crises through commitments, not only for one year, but years to come.

This predictability is necessary for UNRWA to carry out its activities in line with its mandate, which was extended with overwhelming support by Member States last year -- and to help fulfill the central promise of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind.

Together, let us reaffirm our solidarity with Palestine refugees -- recognizing their enormous vulnerability -- by increasing contributions to UNRWA and translating the political support for its mandate into sufficient, predictable and sustainable funding.

Thank you.