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Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories

Written statement* submitted by The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 May 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Rejecting the attacks on UNRWA and Palestinian refugees

The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) condemns the recent statements by the Israeli delegation at the United Nations and by the United States (US) adviser Jason Greenblatt during the UN Security Council briefing on the Middle East that took place on 22 May 2019.

Greenblatt stated: “We need to engage with host governments to start a conversation about planning the transition of UNRWA services to host governments, or to other international or local non-governmental organisations, as appropriate...the UNRWA model has failed the Palestinian people”.

In response UNRWA’s Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl rejected both the US bid to remove the agency’s mandate and the proposal for countries hosting Palestinian refugees to take over aid services.

Krahenbuhl further stated, "I unreservedly reject the accompanying narrative that suggests that somehow UNRWA is to blame for the continuation of the refugee-hood of Palestine refugees, of their growing numbers and their growing needs."¹

UNRWA was created in 1949 due to the ethnic cleansing of approximately 800,000 indigenous Palestinians in order to make way for the creation of a settler state. UNRWA's humanitarian assistance continues to be vital for the over 5 millions Palestinian refugees living either under military occupation or in exile.

UNRWA continues to work to support the livelihoods of Palestinian refugees at a time of great instability in the Middle East. For instance, in Syria, 438,000 Palestinian refugees remain in the country, of which 95% are in need of humanitarian assistance. In May 2019 UNRWA announced that it had received just 6.6% of the total funding requirement that amounts to US\$ 220,796,638.²

Due to the unprecedented funding crisis caused by the US withdrawal of all its contributions, Palestinian refugees are at risk of a severe crisis. The UN agency recently announced that because of the US aid cut one million refugees in the Gaza Strip face hunger in June unless donor countries provide US\$ 60m.³

“We are in a critical situation in terms of our food delivery work,” said Matthias Schmale, the director of the UNRWA’s operations in Gaza. “We have over a million people receiving quarterly food handouts and many of these people would not really survive without that every quarter.”

The EU has become the biggest donor to UNRWA (the US was previously the biggest with US\$ 360 million donated in 2017) and Western countries should continue to fund and support the Agency.

Neither the US nor Israel can unilaterally terminate UNRWA’s operations as its mandate comes from the UN General Assembly. As UNRWA's mandate is due for renewal later this year in the General Assembly, the PRC calls on all Member States to reject the attacks on the Agency and vote in support of UNRWA’s renewal. The termination of the Agency would have catastrophic consequences for Palestinian refugees, the host countries and the stability of the region.

The PRC is also concerned of reports that the US is to propose to dismantle UNRWA during Bahrain conference.⁴ The PRC calls on Member States not to attend the Bahrain

¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/unrwa-rejects-bid-remove-mandate-190523140019866.html>

² https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_-_humanitarian_snapshot_april_2019_.pdf

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/15/1-million-face-hunger-in-gaza-after-us-cut-to-palestine-aid>

⁴ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190528-report-us-to-propose-to-dismantle-unrwa-during-bahrain-conference/>

conference, which would be taken as a sign of support for the destructive US 'deal of the century'.

The PRC stands firm against the continued political attacks by the US and Israel, which aim to liquidate the Palestinian Right of Return.

We call on governments to stand against the US suggestion that UNRWA should cease to operate and that host countries should become responsible for providing services to Palestinian refugees.

We reaffirm that Western nations hold the greatest responsibility in funding and supporting UNRWA due to their historical and ongoing complicity with the Israeli occupation.

The PRC calls on Arab governments to uphold their human rights obligations and to not discriminate against Palestinians seeking refuge or already residing in the country.

The PRC reaffirms that UNRWA should continue to exist until the Palestinian Right of Return is implemented.
