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## Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

### Summary record of the 22nd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 7 November 2022, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Al Hassan ..... (Oman)  
*later:* Mr. Ponikvar (Vice-Chair). .... (Slovenia)

## Contents

Agenda item 46: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

**Agenda item 46: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East**  
([A/77/13](#), [A/77/281](#), [A/77/259](#) and [A/77/314](#))

1. **The Chair** said that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) played a critical role in providing services to and protecting the rights and dignity of the more than 5.4 million Palestine refugees, some 20 per cent of the total number of refugees around the world. In the face of its ongoing financial crisis, UNRWA had made exceptional internal efforts to control costs, while also engaging in significant outreach to Member States and regional groups. He commended those Member States that made contributions to preserve the vital services of UNRWA and respectfully urged all Member States that were considering making such contributions to do so, in light of the difficult financial and political situation facing the Agency, the Palestinians and the Middle East as a whole.

*Statement by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA*

2. **Mr. Lazzarini** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA), presenting the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA ([A/77/13](#)), said that Palestine refugees awaited confirmation of the support and solidarity of the international community at the General Assembly, as a sign that they had not been abandoned. The sinking of boats in the Mediterranean with Palestine refugees on board was a stark reminder of the extent of their despair. The past year had been difficult for Palestine refugees across the region, with increased challenges to the fulfilment of their basic rights. In Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, between 80 and 90 per cent of Palestine refugees were living under the poverty line, and their plight had been exacerbated by the socioeconomic ramifications of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the impact of the war in Ukraine on employment and inflation. Such poverty, combined with the absence of a political process and of hopes for a better future, was fuelling distress, despair and anger.

3. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, high levels of violence affected the ability of UNRWA to deliver services. Refugees living in and around camps were particularly exposed to the violence, and the number of fatalities that year had been the highest since 2005. In Gaza, nearly half of UNRWA students were traumatized from repeated cycles of violence and the 15-year blockade. Nearly all refugees in the Gaza Strip relied on the UNRWA food basket. In Lebanon, Palestine refugees had told UNRWA that “anything” was

better than their current lives. They were already among the poorest, living in overcrowded camps and subject to systemic discriminatory policies. Consequently, deadly journeys on boats had increased, and with them, human tragedy. However, the pressure on UNRWA to do more to support the community was insurmountable given its financial situation.

4. Increasingly, Palestine refugees in Syria were returning to live in neighbourhoods that had been razed to the ground years earlier, having no other options. Every day, children emerged from the rubble to attend UNRWA schools outside the camps. The Agency was now seeking to rehabilitate schools and health clinics in camps such as Yarmouk and Ein el Tal, where Palestine refugees were returning to live. In Jordan, the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly affected the economy and job market, reducing the income of a large portion of the refugees.

5. Despite the difficult daily reality, UNRWA continued to improve the lives of millions of Palestine refugees. More than half a million children continued to attend 700 UNRWA schools across the region, and were among the region’s highest achievers. Every year, 90 per cent of graduates from the Agency’s vocational training centres found jobs within a year of graduating. Close to two million Palestine refugees accessed quality primary health care in UNRWA health centres and over two million of the poorest Palestine refugees received cash or food assistance. In 2021, UNRWA had provided nearly 14,000 loans to women to start or sustain businesses and become financially independent; its social workers had also supported 4,000 survivors of gender-based violence. The Agency had launched a digital learning platform in 2021 to facilitate access to remote learning and was pioneering digital health care in the developing world, sharing its knowledge with host countries and the wider development community. The cost-effectiveness, efficiency and quality of services of UNRWA had been attested to by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network and the World Bank. Those achievements were a credit to the 28,000 UNRWA staff members, the vast majority of whom were Palestine refugees who experienced the same hardship as the people they served.

6. Shifting global geopolitical priorities and regional dynamics had deprioritized the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the growing number of crises over the previous decade had increased indifference towards the plight of Palestine refugees. UNRWA experienced three opposing sources of pressure: the mandate of the General Assembly, under which the Agency was required to deliver public sector-like services; the chronic lack of sufficient voluntary funding from Member States and

the unpredictable nature of most of that funding; and the inability to change the scope or mode of service delivery, as any change to UNRWA operations was perceived with suspicion by the Palestine refugee community and seen as an attempt to weaken the mandate and the rights of the refugees.

7. Chronic underfunding and austerity were affecting the quality of UNRWA services and undermining staff morale. Over the past 10 years, and despite active and continuous outreach, annual underfunding of around \$100 million had forced UNRWA to operate within very strict financial constraints. The funding gap had slowed down efforts, especially in areas that required constant upgrading. Substantial capital was needed for implementation of the digital strategy, to deliver on environmental sustainability commitments and to replace basic assets that had become obsolete. Maintaining quality education, greening the camps and upholding universal vaccination rates were excellent returns on a collective investment. Given the size, scale and scope of its operations, UNRWA deserved an additional \$100 million per year, which was a relatively modest investment given the Agency's role in protecting rights and contributing to regional stability. Without the support of the Member States that had remained committed to the rights of Palestine refugees and to UNRWA, the Agency would have been unable to navigate the challenges which it faced.

8. For over seven decades, UNRWA had delivered its services to one of the most underprivileged communities in the Middle East. The Agency was unique within the United Nations system, as a direct service provider running its own schools and primary health care centres while relying almost exclusively on voluntary funding. However, such services could not be dependent on voluntary and unpredictable resources. Over the previous two years, his priority had been to engage with Member States on ensuring a sustainable funding base for the Agency. At the international ministerial conference on UNRWA convened by Jordan and Sweden in Brussels on 16 November 2021, UNRWA had presented a vision of a modernized Agency that operated with a three-year fixed budget, but that proposal had not yielded the necessary increased financial commitment by Member States. In 2022, he had initiated a dialogue to promote new ways to increase and strengthen partnerships with United Nations agencies, in line with General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) and the recommendations of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA. The objective had been to access the resources available within the United Nations system by asking other agencies to deliver some of the services of UNRWA. However, Palestine refugee communities had

been concerned that reinforcing partnerships in the absence of political prospects could further weaken UNRWA and, consequently, undermine their rights.

9. The mandate of UNRWA was coming up for renewal; he hoped that it would be extended with the same enthusiasm as in 2019. However, that renewal should not be merely procedural in nature; instead, it should be accompanied by a genuine will to provide the necessary predictable resources that would enable Palestine refugees to access a dignified life. The chronic financial shortfall undermined the Agency's ability to fulfil its mandate, while also threatening its stabilizing role in the region. He welcomed the discussions among Member States, led by Norway, on assessed contributions to cover the Agency's operational costs, and he urged States to support a meaningful increase in assessed contributions, as also called for in the report of the Secretary-General on the operations of UNRWA (A/71/849). Palestine refugees needed reassurance that the United Nations remained committed to addressing their plight.

10. While the international community had failed to find a genuine political solution to the conflict, it had succeeded in investing in the human development of a refugee community. Despite the absence of a political solution, maintaining a commitment to the human rights and well-being of Palestine refugees was necessary with a view to strongly supporting their human development, responding to their humanitarian needs and promoting their right to a dignified life pending the achievement of a just and lasting solution.

11. **Ms. Abdelhady** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that her delegation commended the work of the Commissioner-General, the international staff of UNRWA and the Palestinian national staff, who remained dedicated in their support for refugees, despite many struggling to cope under difficult and dangerous conditions. All such efforts tangibly contributed to the lives of Palestine refugees, helping to promote their well-being, protection and development. The commitment of UNRWA to regional stability and to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ensured that, insofar as possible, Palestine refugees were not left behind as they awaited justice.

12. The mandate renewal for UNRWA had come at a critical juncture, against a backdrop of regional and global crises. Historic political support for the Agency should be backed by the necessary resources to ensure its full implementation. Her delegation welcomed the efforts of the UNRWA Advisory Commission to mobilize resources and the work of the Chair of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA. It was

grateful for the contributions of all donors to UNRWA and for their support based on principled solidarity with the Palestine refugees and the responsibility to find a just solution to the question of Palestine.

13. Her delegation recognized the commitment and efforts of the Commissioner-General to diversify and mobilize funding, and appreciated the conclusion of multi-year funding agreements by some countries, as well as the renewal and increase in support to UNRWA, including resumed funding by the United States, strong support from the European Union and first-time donations from certain countries. Efforts to enhance UNRWA capacities and to increase efficiency through strategic planning were also welcome, despite years of painful austerity measures. Regrettably, the Agency was in a chronic financial crisis, as it relied solely on voluntary contributions to sustain its core education, health, relief and social programmes, as well as its emergency appeals. More funding to UNRWA from the United Nations regular budget was therefore necessary in order to support essential operating costs; provide financial stability; enable it to uphold its mandate; avert an interruption in services; and enhance predictability for the effective implementation of its programmes.

14. She asked the Commissioner-General to elaborate further on the funding needs of UNRWA and the current proposals in that regard, and to address the matter of additional costs arising from ongoing restrictions imposed on UNRWA, including on the movement and access of national staff, in violation of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. Such restrictions resulted from the illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip by Israel, the closure of refugee camps in the West Bank and undue taxation and charges.

15. **Ms. Clune** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that the European Union reaffirmed its deep and genuine appreciation for the work of UNRWA and its dedicated staff, who worked in an extremely difficult and challenging context. UNRWA was both an essential provider of vital services to millions of Palestine refugees and a stabilizing force in the region. Until a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution was found to the refugee issue, in accordance with international law, UNRWA remained crucial in providing essential protection and services to Palestine refugees. The European Union would continue to support the Agency in all its fields of operations, including in East Jerusalem. The European Union and its Member States constituted the largest contributor to the Agency. It welcomed additional financial support from other and new donors and called upon all partners, including the

Arab Gulf States, to increase their contributions to UNRWA.

16. **Mr. Akbulut** (Türkiye) said that his country fully supported the crucial work of the Commissioner-General, as well as his active leadership and tireless efforts to maintain the financial stability and operational effectiveness of UNRWA, which was irreplaceable. Pending a just and durable solution to the Palestine refugee question, the international community had a shared responsibility to address the humanitarian issues at hand, something that the Agency had been doing for decades. He asked how Member States could better support UNRWA in providing effective, sustainable and predictable services.

17. **Mr. Lazzarini** (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) said that, over the past decade, the financial shortfall of UNRWA had been approximately \$100-130 million. Furthermore, it was still unclear whether the necessary cash would be available to fully pay staff salaries in November and December 2022. Those salaries were associated with critical services, including the continued running of schools, health centres and all the programmes of the Agency.

18. On the question of what more could be done by Member States, a collective examination of the report of the Secretary-General on the operations of UNRWA should be undertaken to see how its recommendations could be operationalized. More predictable funding was required, something that could be achieved through assessed contributions. UNRWA was requested to run public services, but did not have the financial or fiscal tools of a State; it could not borrow money and was fully dependent on the voluntary contributions of Member States. That model had functioned for about 60 years; however, since 2010, it was being questioned. While it was crucial to renew commitment to addressing the plight of the Palestine refugees by extending the Agency's mandate, a genuine will to increase contributions to the Agency was also essential.

19. He would subsequently share United Nations statistics on the costs incurred by UNRWA as a result of the restrictions on movement.

20. **Mr. Jardali** (Lebanon) said that one might question whether it was appropriate to use the term discrimination to characterize the situation of Palestine refugees in Lebanon, in view of the distinct demographic composition and complicated history of Lebanon and the peculiar circumstances of Palestine refugees in Lebanon for the seven decades since the 1948 Nakbah. Policies governing the residence of Palestine refugees in Lebanon had included restrictions on their practice of medicine and of engineering, fields

reserved for Lebanese nationals except in the UNRWA system, where Palestine refugees were not barred from employment in those professions. Moreover, unlike other foreign nationals, Palestine refugees had been granted the opportunity to obtain a quality education, enabling them to enrol in higher education and obtain advanced degrees in Lebanese institutions, a state of affairs that could hardly be characterized as discrimination.

21. Over the previous three years, Lebanon had faced tribulations whose impact had been felt in particular by Lebanese nationals, who could no longer earn a decent living practising in the fields of medicine and engineering but had instead been forced to emigrate. Taking both the historical context and the current situation into account, it was perhaps unfair to continue to use the term “discrimination” to describe the situation of Palestine refugees in Lebanon.

22. **Mr. Abdelaziz** (Observer for the League of Arab States) said that the League of Arab States was a steadfast supporter of UNRWA, as evidenced by its participation in all donor conferences for the Agency and the adoption at the most recent summit of the League of Arab States of a resolution in support of UNRWA. He asked whether the Agency’s outstanding debt of \$62 million to the Central Emergency Response Fund of the United Nations had been settled, as the possibility of another loan from the Fund had been mentioned in the report of the Commissioner-General.

23. He asked what action could be taken in response to the imposition of fees at border crossings on UNRWA vehicles by Israel, the occupying Power, in violation of United Nations humanitarian standards and international law. It was inconceivable for such fees to be levied by the occupying Power on humanitarian assistance intended for the very people that Power had displaced. Perhaps the fees paid to Israel by UNRWA could be added to that country’s contribution to the United Nations regular budget, enabling the Agency to recover its losses. The time had come to address the issue as part of the ongoing effort to resolve the Agency’s financial crisis. The League of Arab States stood ready to participate in the ongoing negotiations and to reach a consensus solution that struck the right balance of voluntary contributions and assessed contributions from the Organization’s regular budget.

24. **Mr. Arbeiter** (Canada) said that Canada was delivering on its commitment of contributing \$90 million to UNRWA over three years, including in response to the emergency appeals for the crises related to Syria and supplemental funding in response to COVID-19 and to the May 2021 escalation. His

delegation was grateful for the neutrality and other humanitarian principles that were integrated across the work of UNRWA and welcomed the inclusion of wording in General Assembly resolution [76/77](#) acknowledging the commitment of the Agency to operate in line with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, humanity, independence and impartiality. The engagement of Canada with UNRWA included specific support to reinforce ongoing efforts by the Agency to uphold United Nations values and humanitarian principles, including neutrality. He asked how work was progressing in that area, and what impact the inclusion of such wording in the resolution renewing the mandate of UNRWA would have on the Agency in future.

25. **Mr. Lazzarini** (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)) said that UNRWA was eligible for loans from the Central Emergency Response Fund; however, there were limitations on their amount and duration. The maximum that the Agency could borrow was \$30 million, usually only for a few months. UNRWA had previously used that mechanism when it had been unable to fully pay salaries and in order to maintain critical operations. The Agency currently had a \$20 million loan from the Fund. With regard to taxation, a cumbersome system was currently in place, as well as a mechanism for the restitution of taxes. Discussions had been held with the relevant authority to fully review that mechanism, with a view to becoming tax free from the time when the Agency purchased humanitarian goods. While the outcome of that process remained unclear, the objective was to have a simplified system in the future.

26. He had intended no offence to Lebanon, which was an extraordinary model in that it hosted a significant number of refugees, as was the case for other countries in the region. Lebanon hosted a high number of both Palestinian and Syrian refugees, who had been included in the education system of the country since the start of the conflict. Very few countries would have taken such a step so swiftly. The complexity and history of the country were also significant. He had used the term “discrimination” owing to certain policies that affected the ability of Palestine refugees to enjoy full economic inclusion. There was indeed no barrier to higher education; however, Palestinians had no access to 39 segments of the job market and, due to a national law, they could not acquire land or property. Palestine refugees experienced some of the most difficult living conditions in the region in the overcrowded camps in Lebanon. That issue was subject to ongoing discussion through the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee



and with the Government, something that should lead to increased access and opportunities for the many talented Palestinians currently living in a state of despair.

27. UNRWA embraced the wording of General Assembly resolution 76/77, which contained principles which it fully endorsed. Notable investments had been made in the area of neutrality, including preventive measures. All UNRWA staff were given training on neutrality and the use of social media, and teachers received specific training. Recently, thanks to donors, efforts had been intensified to ensure that UNRWA installations were in line with the expected neutrality of the United Nations. Significant attention had also been given to accountability. The Agency was dealing with a long and unresolved conflict, and therefore was not operating in a zero-risk environment. It was, however, implementing a zero-tolerance policy; whenever a breach came to its attention, it used an internal oversight mechanism, conducted an investigation and, if a violation was proven, took disciplinary measures. Significant investments had therefore been made in recent years, and the Advisory Commission was regularly informed of the Agency's achievements.

*Statement by the Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA*

28. **Ms. Havn** (Norway), Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, introducing the report of the Working Group (A/77/314), said that meetings of the Working Group had taken place at a time of critical financial challenges for the Agency, which threatened the development of Palestine refugees and stability in the region. The financial difficulties faced by the Agency in 2022 had been exacerbated by increasing needs, population growth and rising operating costs. Finding adequate financial resources was especially daunting at a time of significant global economic downturn. The General Assembly and the international community were responsible for ensuring that the Agency could fulfil its mandate and maintain its services in order to meet the growing needs of the refugee population.

29. The Working Group urged all Governments to increase their contributions to the Agency, and to contribute to its three funding portals, and particularly to its programme budget. Contributions should reflect appropriate international burden-sharing and be swiftly disbursed, and should keep pace with the requirements of the Agency, while taking into account the effects of inflation and other factors driving the costs of providing services.

30. The Working Group commended UNRWA for its efforts to increase efficiency while maintaining the quality of its services to Palestine refugees, as well as for the measures it had taken to increase its transparency by reporting to the International Aid Transparency Initiative. The Working Group encouraged the Agency to continue implementing those measures and making efforts to that end. It took note of the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the operations of UNRWA (A/71/849) and all resolutions related to the financing of UNRWA, with a view to addressing recurring budget deficits and sufficiently and predictably supporting its work. The Working Group urged all Governments to provide unearmarked multi-year funding where possible, make sustained and predictable contributions to UNRWA and disburse their contributions early in the year where feasible. It invited all Member States to consider those recommendations when assessing possible UNRWA funding in 2022 and beyond. The Agency had made progress in containing its costs, and the Working Group encouraged Member States to accompany those measures with adequate funding for UNRWA.

*Interactive dialogue*

31. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that UNRWA was a lifeline for Palestine refugees and its education, health, relief, social and emergency aid programmes were indispensable to their well-being, protection and development, as well as to regional stability. The Agency was widely considered to be an effective model of humanitarian and development assistance. UNRWA had long served to avert a larger human catastrophe and to sustain millions of refugees through conflict and crisis in the region since the 1948 Nakbah. It remained vital pending the achievement of a just solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees, including the right of return and the right to receive just compensation, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

32. Israel continued to obstruct a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, defying its international legal obligations with impunity, while the international community failed to uphold the law. Thus, the plight of the Palestinian people continued, including that of millions of refugees, 5.8 million of whom were registered with UNRWA. Without the Agency, their suffering would be even more unbearable and turbulence in the Middle East would increase further, with consequences far beyond the region. Her delegation reiterated its deep appreciation for the tireless efforts of UNRWA staff, as well as the Governments and peoples of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria

for hosting Palestine refugees for over 74 years and for their steadfast cooperation with UNRWA. It appreciated the voluntary contributions of all donor countries and organizations and was grateful to all States that supported the Agency's mandate, and urged for that support to be maintained.

33. As was clear from the report of the Commissioner-General, the fields of operation of UNRWA remained unstable, with intense volatility in certain areas. The socioeconomic and humanitarian conditions of Palestine refugees were further affected by the financial crisis in Lebanon; the conflict in Syria; economic decline in Jordan; and aggression by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Such aggressions included constant military raids into refugee camps, recurrent home demolitions and forced displacements, especially among Bedouin refugees. The number of refugees living in extreme poverty in Gaza was multiplying owing to 15 years of illegal Israeli blockade and repeated military aggressions, the latest of which had taken place in August 2022. Over 80 per cent of Palestine refugees in Gaza, Syria and Lebanon were now living in poverty, something that increased their reliance on UNRWA. Meanwhile, the Agency faced persistent funding deficits, despite the rising needs and costs resulting from emergencies and crises, including the disastrous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

34. Against that backdrop of rising instability, despair was also increasing, especially among youth who were more prone to societal ills such as radicalization. In that context, UNRWA provided the minimum essentials for a dignified existence and hope for a more stable and just future. Any further reductions to UNRWA programmes would heighten despair among the refugees and lead to increased risks of unrest and flight. It was therefore crucial to secure more predictable and sufficient funding for the Agency, as had been called for by the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, as well as during the ministerial meetings convened by Jordan and Sweden. More multi-year funding, enhanced partnerships with United Nations agencies, and a larger assessed contribution from the United Nations budget to UNRWA would help alleviate the recurrent shortfalls, providing support for operating costs that were essential for implementation of the mandate. Her delegation hoped that the draft resolution to be adopted at the current session would mark a step in that direction.

35. The international community must send a strong message that it was rallying to ensure the continuity of UNRWA services for Palestine refugees and was committed to fulfilling its obligations in line with international humanitarian and human rights law and United Nations resolutions, until the achievement of a

just solution. It must insist on the inviolability of UNRWA premises and installations; respect for United Nations privileges and immunities; and an end to the harassment and intimidation of UNRWA personnel and to the access restrictions imposed by Israel, the occupying Power. The international community must also defend UNRWA from the defamatory attacks and incitement by Israel and pro-Israel organizations, which sought to denigrate the inalienable rights of Palestine refugees.

36. The State of Palestine looked forward to adoption of the relevant draft resolutions, including the draft resolution renewing the mandate of UNRWA. That outcome would send a strong message of hope and commitment to Palestine refugees that their rights would be realized, including the right of return. UNRWA remained essential pending a just solution to the Palestine refugee question, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and the principles of equality and justice. The international community should show the political will to uphold the rule of law, including measures of accountability, to end the violations by Israel of the rights of the Palestinian people, as well as its illegal colonial occupation and apartheid regime. Only those actions could lead to a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

37. **Mr. Alizada** (Azerbaijan), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that the support of UNRWA to Palestine refugees remained indispensable, particularly in the light of the grave situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip. That situation resulted from the continued violations committed by Israel, the occupying Power, as well as the crises, instability and conflicts affecting other fields of operation in the region. The Movement reiterated its strong support for UNRWA, whose mandate was to provide humanitarian, development and emergency assistance to more than 5.8 million Palestine refugees, pending a just solution to their plight on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Agency's operations remained indispensable until such a solution was attained. The international community should step up its support for UNRWA, especially in the light of the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and instability in the region, which had been further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the global food and energy crises and the recurrent financial shortfalls. UNRWA must be provided with sustained, predictable and uninterrupted support, as repeatedly called for by the General Assembly and the Secretary-General.

38. The current situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was deeply concerning and severely affected the refugee community. The prevailing conditions of instability, violence and declining socioeconomic conditions, meant that Palestine refugees faced further marginalization and poverty. Palestine refugees' rights were being trampled on by Israel, the occupying Power, including through its illegal settlement campaign and attempts to further entrench its occupation of Palestinian land.

39. Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip were sinking deeper into poverty and desperation. The illegal blockade imposed on Gaza continued to cause significant humanitarian, social and economic suffering, increasing dependence on humanitarian aid and amplifying needs that UNRWA was compelled to address with its limited resources. The unilateral and inhumane blockade continued to drastically curtail economic activity, obstruct the delivery and availability of essential services and undermine the potential and hopes of an entire people. The crisis in Gaza must be comprehensively addressed, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, as part of the overall effort to bring an end to the illegitimate Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, since 1967. The illegal blockade on Gaza must be fully and immediately lifted; that step was the only way for the Palestine refugee population in Gaza to become less dependent on UNRWA.

40. The continuing and chronic financial shortfalls faced by UNRWA were deeply concerning and created significant apprehension among the Palestine refugee community, including thousands of UNRWA staff. The General Assembly should follow up in an urgent and comprehensive manner on the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General on the operations of UNRWA. The Agency's mandate should be extended until 30 June 2026, without prejudice to the provisions of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and the necessary funding should be provided for its vital humanitarian and development programmes. Continuing efforts should be made to bring the illegal occupation of Palestine to an end and find a just solution to the issue on the basis on international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, and to enable the Palestinian people to realize their inalienable rights and legitimate aspirations, including the right to self-determination and freedom in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the borders of 4 June 1967.

41. *Mr. Ponikvar (Slovenia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

42. **Mr. Alwasil** (Saudi Arabia) speaking on behalf of the Group of Arab States, said that the question of Palestine refugees remained central to the question of Palestine. The Group of Arab States was committed to upholding the inalienable right of Palestine refugees to return to their homeland, in accordance with internationally recognized resolutions, especially General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and the Arab Peace Initiative.

43. The Group of Arab States rejected the attempts of Israel, which bore full political and moral responsibility for the Palestine refugee problem, to misrepresent the refugee question and oppose the legal registration of Palestine refugees. It commended the host countries, which enabled Palestine refugees to remain resilient and live a decent life until a just solution to their plight was found and their right to return and receive compensation was upheld, in accordance with internationally recognized resolutions.

44. The Group of Arab States fully supported the mandate of UNRWA and rejected any attempt to undermine or alter that mandate or transfer responsibilities from the Agency to any other entity. UNRWA must continue to fulfil its mandate of providing vital services to Palestine refugees in its five areas of operation, including occupied East Jerusalem, until a just solution to the question of refugees was found, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

45. In view of the dire situation in Palestine refugee camps, the Agency required support to maintain its vital services and to protect Palestine refugees from poverty and promote the sustainable development of their communities. The Group of Arab States denounced the systematic attempts by Israel to eliminate and obstruct UNRWA services in Jerusalem and replace them with services provided by Israeli occupation institutions, especially in the area of education and academic curriculums.

46. Given the Agency's alarming budgetary shortfall, the international community should make financial contributions to the budget of UNRWA with a view to ensuring sufficient, sustained and predictable funding. Member States should also support proposals to cover the operational costs of UNRWA from the United Nations regular budget.

47. The Israeli occupation Government should pay restitution for the losses arising from its closure of borders, its blockade and restrictions on movement, which hindered the Agency's delivery of humanitarian



assistance. In closing, the Group of Arab States thanked donor countries, especially the Arab countries that had provided support to UNRWA in recent times, and called upon all donor countries and entities to extend additional financial support to the Agency.

48. **Ms. Clune** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro and Serbia; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Georgia, said that it was vital that UNRWA continued to provide Palestine refugees with the necessary protection and services, including health care and education. The Agency made a key contribution to the viability of the two-State solution; the European Union would continue to support it in all its fields of operations, including in East Jerusalem. The generosity and efforts of the host countries were greatly appreciated. The European Union and its member States were, collectively, the largest contributors to the UNRWA budget and continued to answer its calls for additional funds. The European Union would remain a staunch and predictable supporter of the Agency, including with regard to its efforts to improve efficiency and strengthen management. Additional financial support from other and new donors was appreciated and all partners should translate that step into multi-annual contributions.

49. **Mr. Ríos Sánchez** (Mexico) said that the work of UNRWA would remain indispensable until the final status of the Palestine refugees was resolved. The sustainable financing of UNRWA should be guaranteed to enable it to carry out its work and provide humanitarian assistance in the region, with a focus on the provision of vital services such as health care and education. Mexico commended the Agency's efforts to ensure the efficient use of resources and the transparency and diversification of funding sources.

50. Mexico had contributed \$750,000 to the Agency in 2022 and had recently contributed to the delivery of essential medical equipment to UNRWA hospital in Qalqiliya, in the West Bank. The parties to the conflict must ensure free movement and access of humanitarian personnel and aid, including the provision of fuel, food and medical equipment, in order to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian people. His country would continue to support all efforts to establish lasting peace in the region, based on mutual respect and full adherence to the rule of law.

51. **Mr. Elhomosany** (Egypt) said that through the establishment of UNRWA in 1949, the international community had acknowledged the calamity caused by the Nakbah and the need to support Palestine refugees

until a political solution to their plight was achieved. Seven decades on, the question of Palestine refugees remained unresolved. Prospects for a political solution to the refugee issue were ever more elusive, and were being eroded by ongoing Israeli practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Nevertheless, for decades, UNRWA had capably and professionally provided vital services to Palestine refugees, as evidenced by the many success stories of Palestinian graduates of Agency schools and the quality of health-care services. However, its operations were under strain owing to developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the overall region, such as the escalation of conflict in the Gaza Strip and crises affecting Arab host countries.

52. Since its establishment, the Agency had relied on voluntary contributions from donor countries and entities, but the growth of the refugee population and the attendant increase in refugee needs had gradually led to a budget deficit. Although the reforms undertaken by the Agency had shown its capacity to respond to a changing environment, they had only partially alleviated its burden. UNRWA needed sustained funding that would enable it to plan its activities and achieve financial stability, including through multi-year funding and funding from the United Nations regular budget, in line with the recommendations set out in the report of the Secretary-General on the operations of UNRWA. Such funding would make it possible to solve the Agency's financial crisis once and for all. In addition, the mandate of UNRWA should remain intact and be renewed for three years.

53. While not a donor country to the Agency, Egypt fully supported UNRWA politically in every international forum, and was carrying out reconstruction projects in the Gaza Strip to address the destruction wrought by the recurring escalation between Palestinian factions and Israel. Ultimately, however, the Palestine refugee crisis and the question of Palestine as a whole could be resolved only by enabling the Palestinian people to exercise its legitimate and inalienable right to self-determination and to establish an independent State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

54. **Mr. Al-tememy** (Iraq) said that Iraq unstintingly supported the Palestinian cause; the establishment of an independent, sovereign, contiguous state of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the 4 June 1967 borders; and full, unrestricted, unconditional United Nations membership for the State of Palestine. Far more than a humanitarian agency, UNRWA was on the frontlines of the struggle to uphold Palestine refugees' right of return. It was a legal tool against the occupying

Power's scheme to take the refugee question off the table. Its presence reminded the international community of its commitment to the right of return and its moral, humanitarian and legal responsibility to end the occupation of Palestinian territory and secure the establishment of an independent State of Palestine. UNRWA was a pillar of regional stability, peace and security; but recurrent financial crises imperilled its vital services, exacerbating the insecurity faced by Palestine refugees. Member States should therefore take urgent measures to promote the Agency's financial stability and enable it to secure predictable funding, including through contributions from the United Nations regular budget, expand its donor base, gain access to financial instruments from international financial institutions. Palestine refugees must not be left behind in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

55. Achieving a just, lasting political solution to the plight of Palestine refugees on the basis of the relevant General Assembly resolutions was vital, as was achieving a just, lasting peace in the Middle East. His delegation urged Member States to renew their support for UNRWA and endorsed the resolution to extend the Agency's mandate, as well as all efforts to increase international support for the Agency.

56. **Mr. Do Ngoc Thuy** (Viet Nam) said that UNRWA was an essential provider of vital services to millions of Palestine refugees, including health care and education, and was key to regional stability. Hostilities, heightened tensions and violence had exacerbated the already dire situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. His delegation strongly supported the renewal of the Agency's mandate. All donors should guarantee predictable and sustained funding for UNRWA by providing regular and multi-year contributions and allocating expenses for the Agency's operational costs from the regular United Nations budget. Support for the development of the Palestinian economy was also necessary in order to ease the plight of the Palestinian people. All barriers to economic development, including the policies of occupation that limited movement and the transportation of goods, must be removed. Providing essential services to refugees should not, however, be an alternative to finding a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict. Security and stability could not be achieved in the Middle East without granting the Palestinian people their legitimate rights. Viet Nam supported the two-State solution, allowing for the establishment of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, with secure and internationally recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines

and in accordance with international law, the Charter and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

57. **Mr. Sithole** (South Africa) said that the work of UNRWA in alleviating the dire humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories was commendable and, in order for that work to continue, the Agency was in need of urgent financial assistance. The international community should collectively respond to that need in line with General Assembly resolution 64/89. Sufficient, sustainable and predictable funding would enable over half a million children to receive quality education, as well as access to 140 medical clinics, food assistance and social services for millions of refugees.

58. The situation between Palestine and Israel affected the wider regional dynamics of the Middle East and negatively affected peace, security, economic development and social and political progress in the region. Lasting peace in the Middle East could be achieved only through a two-State solution, including international recognition for an independent State of Palestine, on the borders of 4 June 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital, within recognized and secure borders, living side-by-side in peace with Israel and its other neighbours.

59. **Mr. Gutiérrez Plata** (Colombia) said that Colombia supported a peaceful, definitive and comprehensive settlement to the question of Palestine through the two-State solution, on the basis of the 1967 borders and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. Security assurances and respect for the rights of the population should be preserved and strengthened, with a view to preventing future hostilities in the Middle East and facilitating a definitive solution to the causes of the conflict.

60. His country supported the work of UNRWA and urged the international community to continue supporting the comprehensive action of the United Nations on the ground. It supported the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent, sustainable and internationally recognized State, and the right of the State of Israel to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders.

61. **Ms. Fernández Palacios** (Cuba) said that her delegation paid tribute to UNRWA staff, who had achieved significant progress with few resources. The absence of a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the financial deficit of UNRWA and its consequences were generating a climate of fear and concern for the future among millions of Palestine refugees. The former highest contributor to UNRWA had failed in its attempts to dissolve the Agency. Every

effort must be made to ensure that the Agency could continue to provide services to Palestine refugees. To that end, the Agency must be given the necessary funding and have its mandate renewed.

62. Her delegation welcomed the strategy of UNRWA to expand its donor base, increase digital fundraising and seek innovative funding mechanisms to guarantee access to all services for Palestine refugees. Member States should show political will in order to guarantee sufficient, predictable and sustainable funding for UNRWA for the duration of its mandate.

63. **Mr. Alateek** (Saudi Arabia), speaking also on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, said that the question of Palestine remained the foremost issue in the Arab and Islamic worlds. The Gulf Cooperation Council countries firmly supported the establishment of an independent State of Palestine within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The legitimate rights of Palestine refugees and of the Palestinian people as a whole must be upheld, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, the international terms of reference and internationally recognized resolutions. There was a need to revitalize international efforts to resolve the conflict, in line with the aforementioned terms of reference.

64. The Gulf Cooperation Council countries commended the Commissioner-General and staff of UNRWA for their arduous efforts to fulfil the Agency's mandate in the face of great adversity, which had been compounded by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic over the previous two years. The Gulf Cooperation Council countries would continue to support their Palestinian brethren by supporting UNRWA, whose mandate should be renewed at the current session of the General Assembly. The international community should continue supporting the Agency so as to enable it to fulfil its mandate until Palestine refugees could return to their homeland. The Israeli occupation authorities should respond to calls for peace and engage in serious, good-faith negotiations to achieve peace on the basis of the two-State solution.

65. Speaking in his national capacity, he said that Saudi Arabia was a member of the UNRWA Advisory Commission and one of the largest donors to UNRWA, having contributed over \$1 billion to the Agency since 2000 and \$27 million the previous month. In view of the challenges associated with a growing refugee population, continued Israeli violations and the pandemic, donor countries and entities should continue providing financial support.

66. The Palestine refugee crisis was ultimately political in nature, and could be resolved only by ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab lands, establishing a State of Palestine within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable and imprescriptible right of return.

67. **Mr. Alqaisi** (Jordan) said that in the absence of any prospects for a political settlement of the core issue in the Middle East, UNRWA made an important contribution to maintaining regional security and stability. The international community had an obligation to support the Agency and enable it to continue providing vital services to Palestine refugees, pending a comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine, on the basis of the two-State solution, international law and the recognized terms of reference.

68. The Agency had worked commendably to confront its economic and financial difficulties in the light of global political and economic shifts. UNRWA must be provided with the necessary financial support to plug its recurrent budget deficit and continue fulfilling its mandate. His Government had partnered with the Government of Sweden to convene a ministerial meeting on UNRWA in the margins of the General Assembly high-level segment, in an endeavour to secure sustainable funding and mobilize financial and political support for UNRWA. Following up the outcomes of the meeting, his Government and the Government of Norway had proposed jointly to add a paragraph to the draft resolution on UNRWA operations providing for its operational costs to be covered from the United Nations regular budget.

69. His delegation was grateful to donor countries for their financial contributions to UNRWA, which sent the message to Palestine refugees that the international community would not abandon them until a solution to their plight was reached and their right to self-determination was upheld, leading to the establishment of a sovereign State of Palestine within 4 June 1967 borders, living in peace and security alongside Israel. Investment in the Agency was an investment in the future and in stability, giving Palestine refugees desperately needed hope.

70. **Mr. Alhosani** (United Arab Emirates) said that the question of Palestine and the provision of humanitarian assistance without regard to race, religion or language constituted the main priorities of his Government's foreign policy. Since its establishment, UNRWA had endeavoured commendably to overcome obstacles that imperilled the entire region. The United Arab Emirates had contributed \$684 million to the Agency since 2016

and had pledged to allocate \$25 million in support of Maqasid Hospital in East Jerusalem, in order to enable the facility to expand its medical supply services and support of Palestinian health-care institutions.

71. It was vital to preserve the progress achieved towards the reopening of crossings into the Gaza Strip, which had helped to revitalize the fragile economy of Gaza and meet the humanitarian needs of its people. His Government called on all Member States to continue supporting UNRWA until a just, comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine was attained.

72. **Ms. Faye** (Senegal) said that Palestine refugees were profoundly affected by the conflict in the region, as well as by the dispossession of their land and the unresolved political situation. Until a political solution to the conflict was reached, the best way to provide assistance was by supporting UNRWA with predictable, sufficient and sustainable resources and showing solidarity in the fields of education, health, humanitarian assistance and sustainable development. The Agency provided programmes and services that were essential to the well-being, development and protection of Palestine refugees, as well as to regional stability. All Member States should continue to strongly support UNRWA by voting in favour of all resolutions under consideration, particularly for the renewal of the Agency's mandate.

73. Senegal supported an increase in financing for UNRWA from the United Nations regular budget, to mitigate the unpredictability of its resources and interruptions to its services. Nevertheless, such action would do little more than help to alleviate the consequences of the human tragedy faced by the Palestinian people. All illegal policies and practices must end, including all colonization activities, demolitions of homes, evictions and any other act of collective punishment against the Palestinian civilian population. The challenges in the Middle East could be overcome only through a definitive solution involving an independent and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel, each within its own secure and internationally recognized borders.

74. **Ms. Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the Palestinian refugee question was more a political, legal and moral responsibility of the international community than a humanitarian responsibility. Over 5 million Palestinians had been systematically expelled from their homeland of Palestine by the Israeli occupation. UNRWA, having borne witness to the tragedy of the Palestinian people since 1949, remained indispensable in alleviating their suffering, especially as the situation

in the Occupied Palestinian Territory continued to deteriorate, owing to the violations perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power.

75. Syria hosted Palestinian refugees on its territory, providing them with support and services, treating them the same way it did its citizens, and would continue to do so until they were able to return to their homeland in accordance with United Nations resolutions. Syria had also facilitated the provision by UNRWA of services of various categories to Palestinians. It would spare no effort in protecting Palestinian refugees present on its territory and helping them secure a decent life. Their suffering was the result of aggression on the part of the armed terrorist groups that had occupied their camps and attacked their inhabitants, used them as human shields, confiscated their property and denied access to humanitarian relief, causing a great humanitarian crisis until the Syrian Arab Army was able to liberate the camps. That suffering was part of an agenda to displace them once again in order to prevent them from exercising their right to return to their homes. Israel had been, and remained, the sole cause of the distress of the Palestinian people, having expelled them from their homes under the threat of death and terror. Israel had not been content to merely turn them into refugees for decades but had even pursued them at their places of refuge.

76. In order to be able to continue to perform its duties and provide services to all Palestinian refugees, UNRWA must receive adequate and sustainable funding. Her Government categorically rejected the discontinuation of its education, health care, relief and social services, which would be a violation of international law and resolutions, and any transfer of UNRWA services to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or any other organization or agency. The United Nations must take immediate steps to close the gap in the UNRWA budget, including working with donor countries to secure adequate and sustained funding.

77. **Mr. Chaudhary** (Pakistan) said that Pakistan supported Palestine refugees, who remained resilient in their struggle for a better future despite enduring countless hardships. Against that backdrop, the humanitarian support and protection provided by UNRWA was of vital importance. Some of the most vulnerable Palestinians, including in Gaza, were heavily reliant on the Agency's emergency food assistance programme. The Israeli blockade had severely affected the Gazan economy, causing a surge in extreme poverty and a marked increase in the dependence on international assistance, further exacerbated by the conflicts in May 2021 and in the second half of 2022, as

well as by the COVID-19 pandemic. The blockade violated international law and must be lifted immediately.

78. Pakistan was deeply concerned by the restrictions on movement and access imposed on Palestine refugees and UNRWA staff within the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Israel, the occupying Power, must meet its obligations under international law, including the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention. His delegation greatly appreciated the work done by UNRWA in the areas of infrastructure, education and health, particularly the digital transformation strategy for education and the COVID-19 vaccination campaign. Those actions also contributed to regional peace and stability. Ensuring that UNRWA received adequate and sustained financing was therefore a critical international responsibility.

79. His delegation commended the Agency's efforts to mobilize resources through innovative means, including by diversifying the donor base and introducing responsible investment strategies. Pakistan would continue to extend financial and political support to UNRWA and to support the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and their quest for peace and freedom, as well as a two-State solution. A viable, independent and contiguous State of Palestine, based on internationally agreed parameters, the pre-1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif (Jerusalem) as its capital was a pre-requisite for lasting peace. The seventy-fourth anniversary of the Nakbah was a stark reminder to the international community of its obligation to find a just and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

80. **Mr. Al Kubaisi** (Qatar) said that a consensus had been reached that, in the complex regional and international circumstances, there was no realistic, practical alternative to UNRWA, which helped to alleviate the suffering of millions of Palestine refugees in spite of its meagre financial resources. The General Assembly must therefore continue renewing the Agency's mandate until a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine was reached, on the basis of the two-State solution, leading to the establishment of a State of Palestine within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The solution must include the right of return, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

81. The Agency currently faced an existential quandary, with a chronic shortfall in voluntary funding

from Member States, owing to a lack of political will. Despite measures to rationalize expenses, improve efficiency and make better use of available resources, the Agency was hampered by the unpredictability of its funding. A member of the UNRWA Advisory Commission since 2018, Qatar was committed to doing its duty as an Arab country by extending support to the Palestinian people and the Agency, in line with the principle of burden sharing. In response to the General Assembly's call in its resolution 76/78, Qatar had recently increased its contribution to the Agency's budget and had been the first Arab country to conclude a multi-year agreement with UNRWA. In November 2021, the Qatar Fund for Development had announced that it would contribute a total of \$18 million in support of the core resources of UNRWA over a two-year span. In addition, the Fund's contribution to the Agency's emergency programme in Syria had covered cash assistance, education, health and vocational training.

82. **Ms. Shapir Ben Naftaly** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that her delegation wished to add factual and historical context in response to the comments made by the Pakistani, Palestinian and Iraqi delegations, and all other delegations that had referred to the Nakbah. The constant refusal of the Palestinians to acknowledge or accept the notion of Jewish sovereignty in any part of the land in question was the root cause of the Palestinian refugee problem, and was the reason why it had not yet been resolved. While the Jews had accepted the United Nations partition plan of 1947, the Palestinian side had rejected it. If it had been accepted by the Palestinians, there would now be a Jewish State and an Arab State living side by side in peace. In addition to that rejection, the Palestinians had done everything in their power not so much to establish their own State as to prevent the establishment of the Jewish State. Following the adoption of the partition plan in the United Nations, the armies of five Arab States had attacked the newly independent Jewish State in a war of aggression that had caused severe damage to the young Jewish State. One per cent of the Jewish population had been killed, including many who had recently been liberated from Nazi death camps. If the Palestinians had accepted the partition plan, that war would not have occurred and no Palestinian would have become a refugee.

83. UNRWA had created a system of automatic inheritance, allowing the refugees to pass their refugee status to future generations. According to the Agency, that policy had resulted in over 5.5 million so-called Palestinian refugees, who were unlike any other refugee population in the world. Most had never even been to the land they claimed, or had citizenship elsewhere.



Such privileges had not been accorded to any other refugee population: not to Syrians, Ukrainians, Afghans or to the Jews who had been forced to leave Arab countries in the aftermath of the war in 1948.

*The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.*