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UNRWA

PRESS STATEMENT

UNRWA COMMISSIONER GENERAL WARNS OF "GRAVE AND IMMINENT FINANCIAL CRISIS"

The Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, Karen AbuZayd has warned that UNRWA is facing what she called "a grave and imminent crisis" and that if it is to be averted, the Agency must receive significant additional pledges in the first quarter of 2009.

Addressing UNRWA's annual meeting that brings together donors, host governments, NGO partners and other UNRWA stakeholders, AbuZayd explained that according to present budget projections, in the first quarter of next year, the General Fund which funds UNRWA's core services will suffer a shortfall of upwards of US 87 million. This combined with other unfunded projects put on hold from previous years means an overall shortfall across the Agency of about US 160 million. "This will bring UNRWA closer to financial crisis than it has ever been."

The meeting heard updates from Directors in UNRWA's five fields of operations, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza. With regard to Jordan and Syria, AbuZayd said that UNRWA was "seeking to build on the assets of national stability, economic opportunity and relatively well developed infrastructure to create new avenues of achievement for Palestine refugees". On the destroyed Nahr el Bared refugee camp in northern Lebanon, she appealed to donors in the Gulf to assist with its reconstruction. In June, UNRWA and partners jointly launched an appeal for US 445 million of which US 282 million was for UNRWA's rebuilding. UNRWA has received just US 33 million.

Commenting on UNRWA's work in the West Bank, Karen AbuZayd said that her Agency had introduced "new and more accurate ways to identify refugees in greatest need and that a new family protection initiative focused on ensuring care for the elderly, addressing violence against women and safeguarding children from neglect and abuse. Finally, she praised her team in Gaza which she said had "courageously blazed a trail of innovation and constructive change with concrete benefits for Palestine refugees and the community at large. In addition to the schools of excellence initiative, she also gave as examples a "revamped human rights curriculum, gender initiatives and reforms of social-safety net targeting".

Some 4.6 million Palestine refugees in UNRWA's five fields of operations – Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – are eligible for Agency services, including education, healthcare, social services, shelter, micro-credit loans and emergency aid. UNRWA employs nearly 30,000 staff, the vast majority of whom are Palestine refugees. UNRWA's operations are financed almost entirely by voluntary contributions from donors. The Agency's regular budget for 2008-2009 is \$1.1 billion, which covers the recurrent costs of the Agency's education, health and relief and social services activities.

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