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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 5 November 2014, at noon.

Chair: Mr. Bhattarai (Nepal)

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The meeting was called to order at 12.05 p.m.

Agenda item 50: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

(continued) (A/69/13, A/69/345, A/69/349, A/69/351 and A/69/391)

1. **Mr. de Aguiar Patriota** (Brazil) said that once again, the Palestinian people were suffering the brutal consequences of an unresolved conflict and a prolonged occupation. The recent events in Gaza had fed the cycle of violence and left an intolerable legacy of death, destruction and displacement. Brazil strongly condemned the fact that not even the Agency's personnel and facilities had been spared from attacks. At the same time, the use of UNRWA facilities, particularly schools, to hide and store weapons was unacceptable and must be properly investigated. The unprecedented impact of the conflict on the civilian population posed a tremendous challenge to UNRWA. Efforts should be redoubled to assist the Agency with sustained financial and political support.

2. Brazil had donated close to \$30 million in assistance to UNRWA over the previous seven years. At the Cairo Conference on Palestine-Reconstructing Gaza, it had pledged an additional contribution of 6,000 tons of rice and 4,000 tons of beans, valued at approximately US\$5 million. His Government had also made financial contributions in the framework of IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa). Most recently, the foreign ministers of IBSA had announced their decision to launch a project for the reconstruction of the Atta Habib medical centre in Gaza, in addition to the three other projects financed by the IBSA fund in Palestine.

3. While supporting the recovery in Gaza, the international community must convey a strong and united message against business as usual in the aftermath of conflict. The blockade must be lifted immediately to allow for urgently needed humanitarian aid to enter Gaza and enable its people to begin rebuilding their lives. The ceasefire brokered by Egypt must be consolidated by the parties to enable the resumption of substantial peace talks aimed at resolving the underlying causes of the conflict. Likewise, all Palestinian actors should fully commit to non-violence and dialogue in their pursuit of self-determination.

4. The expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as the continuation of settler violence against Palestinians, remained a matter of grave concern. Those illegal practices constituted serious obstacles to peace in the region and the realization of the two-State solution. UNRWA had a key role to play in establishing and maintaining stability in an environment where poverty, injustice and a lack of opportunities prevailed.

5. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the international community had a political, legal, moral and humanitarian responsibility to address the issue of Palestine refugees, who had long suffered violations of their most basic human rights under Israeli occupation. UNRWA was doing important work to alleviate their suffering, despite the systematic targeting of its staff and facilities by Israel, including during the most recent Israeli attack on Gaza, when the occupying forces had killed 11 UNRWA staff and targeted 76 of the Agency's schools.

6. Despite its own internal crisis, the Syrian Arab Republic would continue not only to host Palestine refugees but also to provide them with extensive assistance and treat them on an equal footing with Syrian citizens, as it always had done in the past. His Government, which continued to support and cooperate with UNRWA, would spare no effort to protect Palestine refugees in its territory, particularly in the light of recent terrorist attacks against them. Armed terrorist groups had recently invaded the Yarmouk camp, where they had forced its inhabitants from their homes, seized their property and blocked the entry of humanitarian assistance. His Government was doing everything in its power to solve the ensuing humanitarian crisis in Yarmouk and ensure that assistance reached those in need, despite repeated terrorist attacks on relief teams. Moreover, it would continue to oppose all attempts to implicate Palestine refugees in the ongoing situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

7. The Agency's donor base must be expanded and States must fulfil their pledges and increase their contributions to allow UNRWA to continue its vital work until Palestine refugees could return to their homes and receive just compensation, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). States that had spent enormous amounts of money to wage wars, intervene in the internal affairs of other States, support

terrorism and provide financial and military assistance to Israel should change their policies to conform with the principles of human rights and of the Charter of the United Nations and relevant resolutions; donating even a fraction of those funds to UNRWA would help to significantly improve the lives of Palestine refugees. It was regrettable that certain States were instead evading their responsibilities, for reasons that were widely known.

8. In response to comments made at the Committee's 20th meeting, he said that rather than crying crocodile tears over the plight of Palestine refugees, Israel should simply end its occupation of the Palestinian territories and allow Palestine refugees to return to their homes; Saudi Arabia and Israel should stop funding terrorist groups, which were attacking Palestine refugees and Syrians alike; and the European Union should put genuine pressure on Israel, Saudi Arabia and other States to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and stop funding terrorism in the Syrian Arab Republic.

9. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) said that despite the many challenges it faced, UNRWA had an indispensable role to play in providing relief and assistance to over 5 million Palestine refugees, pending the realization of their inalienable rights, including their right to return and right to fair compensation, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). His Government was concerned about Israel's persistent denial of the basic rights of Palestine refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, after almost five decades of occupation, and its systematic violations of international humanitarian law, human rights law and United Nations resolutions.

10. In response to the devastation caused during the recent tragic conflict in Gaza, his Government and the Government of Norway had co-hosted the Cairo International Conference on Palestine — Reconstructing Gaza on 12 October 2014, at which US\$5.4 billion had been pledged. Those pledges must be disbursed in a timely manner.

11. His delegation remained concerned about the Agency's budget shortfall. In view of the risk that UNRWA might be forced to forego development activities and carry out only humanitarian work, he urged all States in a position to do so to extend all possible assistance to the Agency.

12. **Mr. Al-Mana** (Qatar) reaffirmed the importance of the Agency's work not only to improve the lives of Palestine refugees but also to promote stability in the region as a whole. He expressed concern at the Agency's chronic budget deficit, which had been exacerbated by the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, where 90 per cent of Palestine refugees required urgent assistance and many UNRWA schools and health-care facilities had been destroyed.

13. The humanitarian situation in Gaza continued to worsen as a result of the ongoing blockade and the recent Israeli attack, during which UNRWA facilities serving as shelters for large numbers of Palestinians had been destroyed. Israel's denial of the Palestinians' inalienable right to return to their homes was undermining any possibility of a peaceful resolution to the question of Palestine.

14. His Government had recently doubled its annual contribution to the Agency and had pledged an additional contribution of US\$1 billion at the recent donors' conference in Cairo to support reconstruction efforts in Gaza. Qatar would continue to strongly support the Palestine refugees, both morally and financially, and urged all Member States to provide adequate financial assistance to UNRWA to enable it to carry out its mandate effectively.

15. **Mr. Almntaser** (Libya) said that during its recent war on Gaza, Israel had acted in flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 by destroying UNRWA facilities, the latest crime on its long list of violations of international law. UNRWA was struggling to carry out its mandate owing not only to insufficient funding but also to the restrictions imposed by Israel on the freedom of movement of UNRWA staff, in violation of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and relevant United Nations resolutions.

16. To resolve the question of Palestine, the root causes of the conflict must be addressed, namely Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and its settlement-building programme, which had reached an unprecedented scale, forcing Palestinians from their homes, bulldozing their land and uprooting trees. Israel's construction of a separation wall, which had dire economic and social consequences for Palestinians, had been declared unlawful by the International Court of Justice. The international community must compel Israel to comply with all

relevant United Nations resolutions and ensure that the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people were upheld, including the right to return, the right of self-determination and the right to an independent sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

17. UNRWA must be provided with increased international financial support to enable it to effectively perform its duties to alleviate the suffering of Palestine refugees.

18. **Mr. Zhu Yanwei** (China) expressed deep concern at the turbulent situation in the Middle East and the plight of Palestine refugees, which had been exacerbated by the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Israel must lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip and facilitate access to goods, humanitarian relief and construction materials so that the people of Gaza could live normal and dignified lives. His delegation welcomed the recent international donors' conference for the reconstruction of Gaza and hoped that the international community would continue to closely monitor the humanitarian situation in Gaza and provide increased economic and social assistance to the Palestinians.

19. In addition to providing bilateral financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority and people, his Government had increased its long-standing annual contributions to UNRWA in 2013 and had provided additional cash contributions in response to the recent conflict in Gaza. His Government was deeply concerned about the funding shortfall of UNRWA, the threats to the personal safety and security of its staff and the restrictions on their movement. It would continue to support UNRWA to the best of its ability and work towards the achievement of an early, just and comprehensive settlement to the Palestinian question.

20. **Mr. Desyatnikov** (Russian Federation) said that the vitally important work carried out by UNRWA under difficult and often life-threatening conditions was not always visible, but remained critical for the millions of Palestine refugees living in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. In a region where armed conflicts had, unfortunately, become a part of daily life, the value of the assistance provided by UNRWA to Palestine refugees could not be overestimated. The assistance provided by the Agency to Palestinians in Syria, a country torn apart by a longstanding civil war and suffering from a humanitarian crisis, was especially important. The Agency's humanitarian work must be continued until a

just solution was found to the refugee problem, which was an integral component of a comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine on the basis of international law.

21. The Russian Federation provided extensive humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees both in the State of Palestine and in Syria and was prepared to continue doing so bilaterally and multilaterally. In particular, his Government was providing assistance in the area of education: during the 2013-2014 academic year, it had provided 158 scholarships to Palestinian students to enable them to pursue undergraduate and post-graduate university studies as well as professional training. Currently, approximately 600 Palestinians were studying in the Russian Federation and, in addition, Palestinian security personnel were taking training courses.

22. **Mr. Çevik** (Turkey) said that the worsening situation in Palestine remained a source of concern to the international community for both humanitarian and political reasons. Alarming developments in the wider region had contributed to a further deterioration of conditions in locations where Palestine refugees had sought temporary shelter. The spiral of violence in Syria continued to be a major concern; Turkey also felt the strain of the Syrian crisis due to the grave humanitarian and security situation on the ground. As of September 2014, some 270,000 of the 540,000 Palestine refugees in Syria were displaced and in need of assistance. That crisis had direct repercussions on the operations of UNRWA and also negatively impacted the response capabilities of neighbouring countries, as well as the Agency's programmes in Lebanon and Jordan.

23. The efforts made by UNRWA had helped prevent a worse humanitarian scenario. However, despite its achievements in expanding its donor base and enhancing the effectiveness of its budget spending, UNRWA faced a shortfall of \$58 million in its General Fund in 2014. Coupled with the large gap anticipated for the Gaza Reconstruction and Emergency Appeal and the Syrian Regional Crisis Plan, the Agency's financial challenges were truly alarming. The international community must support UNRWA so that it could continue its core functions and services.

24. UNRWA was also facing operational challenges due to increasing political and security risks in its five field operations. Severe restrictions on the movement

of its staff and humanitarian goods continued to cause concern, and Israeli security procedures and the ongoing blockade against Gaza significantly increased the cost of operations. Crossing points between Israel and Gaza must remain open to allow the entry of necessary equipment for reconstruction and urgent humanitarian needs. His Government welcomed the tripartite agreement on the temporary reconstruction mechanism for Gaza; all sides should contribute to its implementation in good faith. Turkey, in cooperation with its international partners, would continue its efforts to find a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict.

25. **Mr. Bosah** (Nigeria) said that the conflict in Syria had exacerbated the plight of the Palestine refugees and threatened to unravel the fabric of their community. At the same time, the deepening poverty and increased instability in the West Bank had greatly increased the demand for UNRWA services. With 97 per cent of its funding coming from voluntary contributions, UNRWA faced the challenge of grossly inadequate funds to deliver on its mandate. The lack of funding undermined the quality of its services and jeopardized its ability to fully implement reforms and programmes in critical sectors and to respond to emergency challenges. The protests and demonstrations by the refugee communities and the vandalizing of the UNRWA offices in Gaza, following the Agency's significant cuts in its emergency programmes, offered only a glimpse of the unrest which could result from the Agency's continued financial crisis. His delegation welcomed General Assembly resolution 65/272, commended the Agency's fundraising efforts and the generosity of donors, and also commended the Agency's Medium Term Strategy for 2016-2021 and its Strategic Response Plan. It was critical for the international community to work together to ensure that UNRWA received the funding it needed. Much more needed to be done by all parties to guarantee the safety of UNRWA personnel and protect the immunity of its premises. His delegation reiterated the imperative of seeking a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the principles of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

26. **Mr. Sriyono** (Indonesia) said that his delegation noted with deep concern that Israeli policies and practices had persistently hampered the efforts of UNRWA to provide assistance to Palestine refugees,

thereby exacerbating their situation. Indonesia reiterated its call to Israel to abide by international law. As the occupying Power, Israel was obligated to offer UNRWA the necessary means to help it fulfil its mandate, including by ensuring freedom of movement and easing the cumbersome procedure for the delivery of the Agency's services. He echoed the Commissioner-General's position that UNRWA and its activities were covered by the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. Israel must respect the inviolability of UNRWA premises and stop imposing charges on the Agency's shipments and detaining goods.

27. Indonesia reiterated its strong condemnation of the Israeli blockade of Gaza and the routine and savage violence that Israel inflicted on the Palestinian population, leaving the injured with neither hospitals nor medicine and children with neither schools nor education. The Israeli bombardment of the area in July 2014 had compounded the already precarious humanitarian situation. His delegation was confounded that those events were taking place in 2014 — the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Israel's attitude towards the international community appeared the same as its behaviour towards the Palestinians: one of contempt and impunity. Israel must observe the fundamental norms of international law, which prohibited colonization and foreign occupation. The occupation of Palestine must end immediately, while the issue of Palestinian refugees, including their property and revenues, must be settled in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.