

STATEMENT BY MR. KHAGEN DAS, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON THE UN RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST AT THE 64TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 03, 2009



Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, please allow me to express appreciation for the work of the Commissioner General and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). We also thank the UNRWA Advisory Committee and the members of the working group on the Financing of UNRWA, for their efforts in support of this Agency.

We felicitate UNRWA on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of its establishment. UNRWA's work in providing humanitarian assistance, including education, health care and social services is highly commendable.

India has consistently supported these efforts. We reiterate our appreciation for the difficult but essential service that UNRWA has rendered over the years, making assistance of the Palestinian refugees its highest priority.

Mr. Chairman,

The report, and other reports of the UN Secretary-General under this agenda item, clearly illustrate the severe challenges UNRWA continues to face.

The Agency's budgetary shortfall continues to grow and it is finding difficult to maintain the existing level of services. This paucity of funds is paralleled by an increase in the demands upon the Agency for assistance and support, in particular in Gaza. We are concerned that the global financial crisis has adversely impacted UNRWA's operations.

These funding challenges exacerbate existing pressures of caring for refugees in overcrowded camps leading inhuman lives that are in urgent need of up-gradation. Such challenges cannot be addressed by a reduced capacity to help. There is an urgent need for greater international effort to ease UNRWA's fiscal burden.

Against this backdrop, India made a special contribution of US \$ One million in January 2009 in response to the Gaza flash appeal made by UNRWA for extending assistance to Palestinian civilians.

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of UNRWA and given the financial constraints faced by the Agency, India has made a commitment to increase its contribution to the Agency to US \$ One million this year.

These are in addition to our financial assistance packages to the Palestinians National Authority and other humanitarian assistance efforts for the well-being of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Chairman,

We share Commissioner General's assessment that an open access regime and greater freedoms for Palestinians are essential for creating an atmosphere in which the forces of compromise, moderation and tolerance are encouraged.

The insecurity bred by extreme levels of poverty among the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories is heightened by the lack of definitive progress in the peace process.

This leads us to the larger point: the only lasting solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees is a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the long-standing conflict in the Middle East.

We believe that the solution to the Palestine issue should be based on the relevant UN Resolutions, the Arab Peace Plan and the Quartet Roadmap resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders, side by side at peace with Israel.

Till the day when a mutually-acceptable peace is in position, it is incumbent upon all of us to support UNRWA, as the primary source of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugees. For this reason, we endorse efforts to support UNRWA by expanding its capacity to render assistance.

India will, of course, continue to do all within its capacities to assist Palestine in its endeavours in capacity and institution-building.

We salute the struggling people of Palestine. We express our solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Thank you Mr. Chairman

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