

STATEMENT BY MR. VIJAY INDER SINGLA, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF INDIAN DELEGATION ON AGENDA ITEM 51-“UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (UNRWA)” AT THE FOURTH COMMITTEE OF THE 68TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 7, 2013

**Mr. Chairman,**

At the outset, I would like to express the Indian delegation’s appreciation for the work of the Commissioner General, Mr. Filippo Grandi and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). We would like to thank the Commissioner General for his informative and detailed briefing to the Committee on the activities of UNRWA. We also thank the UNRWA Advisory Commission and the members of the working group on Financing of UNRWA, for their efforts in support of the Agency.



**Mr. Chairman,**

The situation in the Middle East region continues to remain fragile and unpredictable with the unprecedented transformation in several countries in the recent years and the ongoing conflict in Syria. Regrettably the long standing Palestinian question and the related Arab-Israeli issues have also largely remained unaddressed and unresolved. Further, the armed conflict in Syria has also seriously impacted the situation of Palestinian refugees.

In this context, the role of UNRWA in providing critical assistance to the Palestinian refugees assumes greater significance. The Agency today is a symbol of the international community's commitment to the well-being of the Palestinian refugees until a just and durable settlement of the issue is achieved. India commends UNRWA for its exemplary work, carried out under extremely difficult circumstances for the nearly 5 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. We also take this opportunity to commend the cooperation of host countries to UNRWA's work.

We are happy to note that despite the many challenges it faces, UNRWA remains committed to building the human development of the refugees and improving their lives, while further improving service delivery and cost-effectiveness. Notable in particular is the significant progress achieved in 2012 and 2013 in operationalizing far-reaching reforms in the Agency's education and health programmes and in extending urgent assistance to 278,000 Palestine refugees affected by the conflict in Syria. We once again commend and encourage UNRWA to continue its valuable activities and work.

**Mr. Chairman,**

I would like to take this opportunity to place on record India's consistent support for the Palestinian cause.

We remain firm in our support for a negotiated solution to the Israeli Palestinian issue resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel. We will also continue to support Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations.

Bilaterally, India is committed to support the development and nation-building efforts of Palestine and has been providing development support to the Palestinian Authority. During the last three years alone, India has contributed US\$ 10 million annually as untied budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority. During the visit of President Mahmoud Abbas to India in September 2012, Government of India announced a contribution of US Dollar 10 million to Palestine's budget to help address its financial requirements. The first tranche of US \$ 1 million was released during the visit of India's Minister of State for External Affairs Mr. E. Ahamed to Ramallah in July 2013. We are also offering 100 slots to the Palestinian Authority for capacity building and human resource development under our technical and economic cooperation programme.

From the financial year 2009-10, we enhanced our annual contribution to UNRWA to US\$ 1 million, in addition to a special contribution of US \$ 1 million to UNRWA in response to a flash appeal in 2010. India's contribution of US \$ 1 million for the current year was presented to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA during his visit to India in September 2013. This will be primarily used for provision of food and

medicines to the displaced people in the refugee camps under UNRWA's various programmes.

Also through the IBSA [India-Brazil-South Africa] Fund we will continue to undertake capacity building and infrastructure projects that are prioritized by the Palestinian Authority as we had done in the past.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

The report under this agenda item, clearly illustrates the severe challenges UNRWA continues to face.

The immediate challenge before UNRWA that needs to be addressed is the crisis of chronic underfunding. Shortage of funds adversely impacts the quality and maintenance of the existing level of services.

We support the efforts of UNRWA to enlarge the donor base. In spite of the current difficult global economic condition, it is important that the international community continues to show commitment to the cause of Palestine.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The continuing blockade of Gaza is causing severe hardship to the population. While there has been improvement in restrictions on West Bank and movement of humanitarian supplies and construction material into Gaza, approval of UNRWA projects, restrictions due to the separation barrier, closures, and curfews in the Palestinian territories is causing severe hardships to the affected population. The restrictions on freedom of movement of UNRWA staff members continue to hinder the work of UNRWA.

We join others in calling upon Israel to lift the blockade and allow the resumption of normal socio-economic activities in Gaza and facilitate free movement of UNRWA staff.

**Mr. Chairman,**

As I have stated earlier India has been steadfast in its support for the Palestinian cause from the beginning. As demonstrated over the past six decades, including during its memberships in the UN Security Council, India supports all efforts towards political resolution of the Palestinian Question.

We are encouraged in this regard by the resumed and ongoing direct talks between Israel and Palestine facilitated by the US. We hope that the direct talks will lead to concrete results within the envisaged time frame and a just and durable solution to the conflict will be arrived eventually.

Until then, Mr. Chairman, it is imperative upon all of us member states to fully support UNRWA, as the primary source of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugees.

**Thank You Mr. Chairman.**

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