

**73rd Session of the
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Fourth Committee**

**Agenda Item 54
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near
East**

INDIA STATEMENT

By

**Mr. Mahesh Kumar
First Secretary**

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Thank you, **Mr. Chairman** for giving me the floor.

We thank Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner General UNRWA for his reports and briefing.

Mr. Chairman,

India's deep commitment to the Palestinian cause, including welfare of Palestine refugees, is abiding. India has been supportive of UNRWA's work since its establishment including its efforts to secure sufficient, adequate and predictable resources for the duration of its mandate.

Against the backdrop of the serious resource constraints faced by UNRWA, the Government of India has increased its annual financial contribution five-fold to the UNRWA core budget, from 1 million dollars in 2016 to 5 million dollars in 2018. We are committed to contribute 5 million dollars in 2019 also.

Mr. Chairman,

As part of its ongoing assistance programmes in Palestine to strengthen capacity-building efforts focused on institutions, services and training personnel,

the Government of India provides 150 places for Palestinian professionals every year in its Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme.

India also provides 100 scholarships to meritorious students under the General Scholarship Scheme of the Indian Council of Cultural Relationship. Those programmes are also available to Palestine refugees.

The Government of India started an annual Youth Exchange Programme with Palestine in 2017. Prime Minister Modi, during his visit to Palestine earlier this year, announced that the annual number of young people who took part in the programme had doubled, from 50 to 100. Palestine refugees also participate in the Youth Exchange Programme.

In addition, during the last five years, under an India-Palestine development partnership, 17 agreements have been signed in the fields of agriculture, health care, information technology, youth affairs, consular affairs, women's empowerment and media.

Under those agreements, around 70 million dollars of financial support and project assistance has been offered for projects like post-2014 war reconstruction efforts in Gaza; the construction of five schools; the India-Palestine Centre of Excellence for Informational and Communication Technologies at the Al-Quds University, with a satellite centre in Ramallah; the India-Palestine Techno-park in Ramallah; a 100-bed super specialty hospital in Bethlehem; an India Studies Chair at the Al-Quds University; the construction of the Palestine Institute of Diplomacy in Ramallah; a National Printing Press; and establishing a Heritage Centre for the Empowerment of Women and Young People.

Mr. Chairman,

UNRWA, which was established by the UN General Assembly seven decades ago, today looks after the welfare of 5.4 million Palestine refugees. However, almost all of the UNRWA's resources come from voluntarily contributions, with a limited donor base.

This arrangement is fraught with uncertainties. Even the core services to the Palestinian refugees, notably in the fields of education, health, and assistance to the most vulnerable refugees are susceptible to interruption.

Mr. Chairman,

The UN Board of Auditors in their latest report pointed out that as a result of suspended contributions amounting to 400 million dollars in respect of the years 2017 and 2018, the Agency's projected overall deficit is around 450 million dollars. This is unsustainable and a cause of concern.

We appreciate the response of donors that had ensured uninterrupted service delivery to the Palestinian refugees and had temporarily reduced the financial shortfall. In this regard, the role of some of the Advisory Commission members of UNRWA is also praise worthy.

Since the membership criterion to the Advisory Commission is 15 million dollars worth of contribution during the previous 3 years, we hope that Advisory Commission members who have not been able to contribute up to this level would scale up their contribution.

Mr. Chairman,

We welcome Commissioner General's presentation on the significant Agency-wide measures that UNRWA is taking, within the framework of its General Assembly mandate, to enhance efficiency. We note that these measures had resulted close to 100 million dollars of efficiency savings so far and encourage the Commissioner-General to sustain and expand these efforts. However, it is also pertinent that to note that these austerity measures are not the only path for UNWRA to deliver on its mandates.

Provision of adequate, sustainable and predictable funding would have to be made. Additional resource allocation from the regular budget could be considered.

Mr. Chairman,

We appeal to other traditional donors of UNRWA to consider enhancing their contributions and non donor member states to consider contributing to UNRWA. This is perhaps the practical way of expressing continued solidarity with Palestine refugees.

Thank you, **Mr. Chairman.**