

10 December 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the Announcement of
Voluntary Contributions to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine
Refugees in the Near East**

I declare open the meeting of the Ad hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine in the Near East.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

This meeting represents the primary forum within the General Assembly at which donors announce their financial support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

I wish to make note of the bitter irony that this pledging meeting takes place on the same day as the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As we celebrate this historic document throughout the building and throughout the world, we cannot escape the fact that our Palestinian Brothers and Sisters have no reason to celebrate. Their rights have entered a state of perpetual suspension.

The establishment of the Agency represented one of the first humanitarian undertakings of the United Nations. UNRWA has since become the United Nations' largest operational Agency, currently providing education, health, relief and social services to Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Commissioner-General reports to the General Assembly annually on UNRWA's programmes, operational challenges and accomplishments. The General Assembly considers the report and adopts resolutions regarding the work of the Agency. Last year, through its resolution 62/102 of 17 December 2007, the Assembly extended UNRWA's mandate until 30 June 2011.

Members are aware that the General Assembly established UNRWA in December of 1949 by GA resolution 302 (IV). Next year marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of UNRWA by the General Assembly. I have noted that the Assembly, by adopting resolution 63/91 last Friday, decided to hold a high-level meeting on 1 October 2009 to mark this occasion. We all know that UNRWA was mandated "to prevent conditions of starvation and distress" among the Palestine refugees who fled their homes in 1948, and "to further conditions of peace and stability" in the areas in which the Agency

operates. It represents a terrible political failure of the United Nations that this mandate must be renewed once again.

Excellencies,

It is tragic that any people should have remained refugees and in need of international humanitarian assistance some 59 years after the international community undertook to find a just and durable solution to their situation. This was meant to be a stop gap-measure, not a permanent fixture of ongoing misery and deprivation for the whole world to witness year after year. There is a growing recognition among the international community that a durable peace settlement in the Middle East cannot be obtained without addressing the refugee question in all its dimensions.

At present, UNRWA faces heavy challenges on all sides. Demands for its increasingly complex services grow steadily, and the Agency is the lead responder to a long-term emergency in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Despite the strain of such demands on staff and infrastructure, the Agency remains a stable service provider for all registered Palestinian refugees. We must demonstrate our solidarity with the Palestinian refugees who are suffering indignities and deprivations that are unacceptable to minimum human rights.

Excellencies,

The international community remains morally obliged to sustain its commitment to alleviate the plight of the Palestinian refugees. That commitment finds daily expression through the vital and invaluable services provided by the dedicated and hard-working UNRWA staff. I should like to take this opportunity to pay particular tribute to the devotion with which the staff members of UNRWA perform their tasks in the field.

I should also like to stress that UNRWA's leadership is committed to substantive reform of the Agency's management and programme delivery. UNRWA's "organisational development" reforms have been under implementation since 2006, and are aimed at strengthening the Agency's capacity to plan, implement and evaluate its activities, enhancing accountability and effectiveness, and optimizing the use of donor resources. The reforms enjoy broad support among UNRWA's stakeholders, and contribute to the results-based culture that the United Nations seeks to promote.

Excellencies,

UNRWA is the only United Nations programme that is a direct subsidiary of the General Assembly. This gives the Assembly a special responsibility to fulfill our obligations to UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees. Through your special relationship to UNRWA, and indeed to the refugees themselves, comes the responsibility to offer support.

Your pledges as well as your statements today will constitute valuable moral and financial support for UNRWA and the refugees it serves. I would urge you, particularly our Arab Brothers and Sisters, to take this opportunity to reaffirm the international community's joint efforts by providing the Agency

with the financial resources it requires for the year 2009, which are essential for the 4.6 million Palestinian refugees.

I shall now give the floor to the Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, Mr. Filippo Grandi. The Deputy Commissioner-General will provide a detailed breakdown of UNWRA spending plans during the next budget cycle. Mr. Grandi will also describe the conditions that affect the Palestinian refugees, the complex challenges that UNRWA faces, and recent achievements to strengthen its financial and programme management and operational effectiveness.