

7 December 2010

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
to the Committee of the General Assembly for the Announcement of
Voluntary Contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works
Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)**

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

UNRWA is one of the United Nations' largest operational Agencies, currently providing education, health, relief and social services, and protection to Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Since the General Assembly established UNRWA in December 1949, the number of Palestine refugees dependant on UNRWA services has been growing steadily. Almost five million persons are now registered with the Agency, more than six times the original number enrolled back in 1950.

More than six decades after its establishment, UNRWA's mission continues to be of critical importance to Palestine refugees, to the Middle East and to the international community. It is tragic that any people should have remained refugees and in need of international assistance and protection more than six decades – that is three generations ! - after the international community undertook to find a just and durable solution to their plight.

UNRWA was meant to be a temporary relief agency, not a permanent fixture of the Middle East. But the conflict is persisting, and until it is resolved in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations' General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the international community has to demonstrate its solidarity with Palestine refugees and alleviate their plight. That commitment finds daily expression through the vital and invaluable services provided by the dedicated UNRWA staff.

UNRWA's major donors have been extremely generous. Unfortunately, funds made available to UNRWA have not kept up with the growing numbers - and increasingly complex needs - of the refugees, a more challenging operational context, as well as more rigorous reporting requirements from donors, and - in recent years - from the General Assembly itself.

Only three months ago, the Agency was seriously concerned that it would not be able to sustain its operations. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of its three largest donors, that prospect has been temporarily averted. But UNRWA's medium-term financial outlook remains precarious. In just a moment, UNRWA's Deputy Commissioner-General, Ms. Margot Ellis, will provide Member States with the latest financial figures and outlook for 2011.

The financial difficulties faced by the Agency have now become structural, threatening the continued provision of quality services to refugees, preventing sound planning, and undermining the efforts made by the Agency's management to sustain critical reforms.

Excellencies,

UNRWA is the only major United Nations program that is a direct subsidiary of the General Assembly. This gives the Assembly a special responsibility to fulfill its obligations to UNRWA and Palestine refugees.

Once the Secretary-General's Report on the Strengthening of the Management Capacity of UNRWA, as requested by the Assembly last year, is available, I would also urge you to consider the best ways to address the structural nature of UNRWA's financial deficits and look again - in an open, visionary and creative manner - at the adequacy of the level and scope of the Assembly's current funding for UNRWA through its regular budget.

Your pledges as well as your statements today will constitute valuable moral and financial support for UNRWA and the refugees it serves. By mobilizing this international assistance, we are also reaffirming our commitment to the Middle East peace process.