

ISRAEL

65th SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Check Against Delivery

**Statement by
Gilad Cohen
Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Fourth Committee
Agenda Item 51

**“United Nations Relief and Works Agency for
Palestine Refugees in the Near East”**

United Nations, New York
2 November 2010

PERMANENT MISSION OF ISRAEL
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
800 Second Avenue, 15th Floor
New York, NY 10017

Tel: 212-499-5510
Fax: 212-499-5515
info-un@newyork.mfa.gov.il
<http://israel-un.mfa.gov.il>

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to congratulate you for the professional manner in which you have conducted these proceedings. I also wish to thank Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi for his briefing.

At the outset, I would like to affirm Israel's support for UNRWA's humanitarian mission. During its more than sixty years of operation, UNRWA has displayed a commitment to provide important humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees.

Israel — without compromising its own security in any way — will continue to do its utmost to facilitate UNRWA's operations. On behalf of my delegation, I wish to reiterate Israel's commitment to the understandings expressed in the 1967 Comay-Michelmore Exchange of Letters between Israel and UNRWA.

To this end, Israel is dedicated to maintaining the close coordination that exists between UNRWA and Israeli officials in the field. UNRWA's leaders, including Commissioner-General Grandi, have described the close relationship that they enjoy with the Israeli authorities in many instances, including in international fora and in official discussions with my government. Their statements on this subject reflect the day-to-day reality on the ground — a clear contrast with the impression conveyed by some of the statements we have heard in this forum and with the draft resolutions regarding UNRWA that this committee will soon vote upon.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to highlight a few of the many ways in which Israel is cooperating with UNRWA and other international organizations to ensure that humanitarian relief reaches Palestinian populations in need.

Despite continued terrorist attacks emanating from the Gaza Strip, Israel's Government made the significant decision on June 17th to liberalize the system through which civilian goods enter the area and to expand the inflow of materials for projects under the supervision of international organizations. The only goods that remain restricted are arms, weapons and war materiel, and certain items that have dual use applications.

Since this decision, the number of trucks entering Gaza has doubled to approximately 250 per day. These trucks have delivered more than 365 thousand tons of aid; 25 million liters of fuel; and 14 thousand tons of cooking gas to the Gaza Strip since June 17th.

Israel is working to increase the number of trucks entering Gaza through the Kerem Shalom Crossing to 350 trucks per day by the end of the year. However, our ability to extend the opening of the Karni Crossing on more days has been limited by continued threats and terrorist attacks. Let me remind you that this crossing has been attacked many times by Palestinian terrorists.

Over the last four months, Israel approved 31 new international development projects in the Gaza Strip, including 12 UNRWA projects. In support of these projects, UNRWA has received 1,556 tons of building materials since September. These new initiatives will add to the four UNRWA projects that were completed in Gaza during the first half of 2010, which included a

new sewage treatment facility in Tel Sultan; 151 new housing units in Khan Younis; and new facilities for the Agency's summer camps.

UNRWA continues to work with Israel on new projects, however its logistical arrangements have created some delays in the delivery of building materials. For example, we did not receive requests for materials needed for some of the approved projects mentioned in the Commissioner-General's briefing yesterday until the beginning of October.

In regards to UNRWA's schools, the Agency has submitted requests in the Gaza Strip to build eight new schools, two new clinics, and expand the facilities of two existing schools. Nine of these projects have been approved — and materials are beginning to flow into Gaza for their construction.

Israel continues to collaborate with UNRWA in finding an appropriate location for the two school projects that were located nearby Hamas military installations and the one site that the Agency requested to relocate on its own. We must not forget that Hamas cynically places its military installations near and inside civilian buildings, including in close proximity to UN facilities. UNRWA will soon receive a letter from the Israeli authorities specifying the status of each and every project requested.

In addition to expanding the flow of goods entering Gaza, Israel has undertaken many steps to promote and substantially improve the West Bank economy, including the removal of hundreds of roadblocks and checkpoints. These measures and our continued cooperation with international organizations are having a significant impact. In the first 6 months of 2010 alone, real GDP growth amounted to 9% in the West Bank and 16% in Gaza according to the IMF.

Mr. Chairman,

Notwithstanding the cooperative relations that I have described, there have been unfortunate instances in which UNRWA officials have acted contrary to the Agency's humanitarian mission by making controversial political statements. These forays into political terrain cannot be considered to be part of a legitimate advocacy role. They undermine the Agency's neutrality and harm its humanitarian mission.

It is telling that when it comes to statements of Agency officials that are not to the liking of the Palestinian side, the Agency is quick to respond and deny, while not acting in a similar manner when it comes to statements of other Agency officials regarding Israel.

As Israel has reiterated time and again, UNRWA would do well to focus its energies on its vital humanitarian role, leaving the realm of politics to others.

Mr. Chairman,

Many of the Member States who have made these politicized statements are not supporting UNRWA in ways that can improve the conditions of the Palestinian refugees on the ground.

Let me state for example that according to UNRWA statistics no Arab country figured among UNRWA's 10 major donors from 2000 until 2009. Only two Arab countries were among the top

20 donors during this period. Furthermore, Arab countries only provided about 10 percent of UNRWA's total regular and non-regular budget in 2009, with the vast majority of funding coming from Western countries.

Israel's sincere hope is that our Arab neighbors will show their support for the Palestinian people through meaningful contributions to organizations such as UNRWA, instead of offering empty and inflammatory rhetoric that does nothing to help the situation on the ground. While some Arab countries contribute positively in this way, the unfortunate general trend is quite the opposite. Along the same lines, we ask the Arab countries to contribute to the establishment of peace between Israel and the Palestinians through measures that extend beyond words — and translate into deeds.

Mr. Chairman,

As I have mentioned, UNRWA's work on the ground is important and we will continue to support it. However, the resolutions before this committee are politicized and ignore many basic facts. One striking example of the many failures in these resolutions is that they do not mention the destructive role played by the Hamas terrorist organization in our region.

This terrorist organization — which is now ruling the Gaza Strip as a result of its violent takeover of the area in 2007 — calls openly for Israel's destruction, engages in brazen weapons-smuggling and terrorism, and continues to launch rockets at Israeli towns and civilians. Since 2001, some 8800 rockets have been launched from Gaza against Israeli towns, the majority of which since Israel's 2005 withdrawal. For more than four years, Hamas has held our kidnapped soldier, Gilad Shalit, and deprived him of his most basic human rights, including any visit from the Red Cross.

Hamas continues to place weapons in the midst of civilian populations and near UN facilities, thereby deliberately putting them in harms way. It has issued countless threats to UN staff, including UNRWA, and has tried to obstruct their work. Hamas has confiscated food shipments that were intended for UNRWA, broken into their offices to steal equipment, and allowed militants to launch two cowardly attacks on UNRWA Summer Camps just last July.

These activities have been mentioned in various briefings before the Security Council from the Secretariat over the past year. Let me quote from one such briefing. On June 15 before the Security Council, Mr. Robert Serry, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, said:

“In early June, Hamas security forces broke into the offices of a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including United Nations partners, in Gaza City and Rafah, closing them down and confiscating their equipment. In a statement on 3 June, I called for the reversal of these repressive and unacceptable actions, which only harm Palestinians.”

I must ask: why are these facts absent from the resolution drafts on the current agenda item and from many of the statements we have heard over the past two days?

There has not been a single word about the violent takeover over the Gaza Strip, no mention of the continued firing of rockets on Israeli civilians, no discussion about Hamas' continued

obstruction of the work being carried out by UNRWA and other international organizations. There has been no call for the immediate release of Gilad Shalit.

Mr. Chairman,

In closing I would like to state clearly that Israel shares the goal of all parties to resolve the refugee problem, alongside the other aspects of the conflict. As such, we call on the Palestinian Authority to resume direct negotiations with Israel without delay. Clearly, we can only solve the conflict through direct negotiations that touch upon both parties' vital interests.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.