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

Statement on behalf of the European Union

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(check against delivery)

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

*) Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Mr Chairman,

I would like to stress that the European Union appreciates the commitment by UNRWA staff and management in fulfilling their duties under especially difficult, often very dangerous circumstances. 2006 has been an especially challenging year. The European Union underlines its strong support for and commitment to the essential work that UNRWA carries out.

The EU also wishes to express gratitude to the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria whose countries for more than five decades have been providing assistance to Palestinian refugees.

The European Union is the largest contributor to UNRWA. With contributions from the European Commission and Member States of over 205 million Euro in 2006, the European Union contributes more than half of the income of UNRWA.

The EU commends the work of the expanded Advisory Commission which supports the efforts of the Commissioner General to develop the enhanced strategic response to the enormous challenges which UNRWA is facing. The EU strongly supports the Organizational Development process, and remains actively interested in the process.

The EU welcomes the new form and substance of the annual report of the Commissioner General. The reporting period now covers the calendar year instead of from July to June. This allows UNRWA to bring annual reporting in line with budgeting and planning periods. It also helps UNRWA to become more results-oriented in its programming.

Mr Chairman,

Of the 405 000 Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA in Lebanon, 104 000 reside in camps in and around Saida and a further 99 000 are registered in the vicinity of Tyre. These communities were most directly affected during the armed conflict this summer. The conflict caused greater hardship in the camps, where Lebanese civilians sought refuge in large numbers. While focusing on the plight of

Palestine refugees within its mandate, UNRWA, however, extended its support to anyone who needed help within the wider Lebanese population.

On the positive side the EU notes that UNRWA projects worth three million dollars were included in the Lebanon government's recovery plan presented at the Stockholm Conference in September. This is certainly a clear message that the improvement of refugee living conditions is part and parcel of reconstruction and rebuilding in southern Lebanon.

During the Lebanon conflict UNRWA lost a staff member in an Israeli air strike. The EU wishes to express condolences for the loss of a worker who devoted his life to the valuable work for refugees.

The European Union expresses serious concern about the deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and financial situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The closure system is a primary cause of the humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. It restricts Palestinian access not only to basic services such as health and education, but divides communities from one another and from their land, places of work and sites of religious worship. The closure system also undermines the economic viability of the Palestinian Territories. The European Union recalls the utmost importance of the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access, particularly the permanent opening of the Rafah, Karni and other crossings.

The EU continues to be concerned about the severe humanitarian conditions affecting the refugees, in particular the situation of Palestinian refugee children. We call for every possible effort by the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to give children special protection and to fully respect the rights of children and to implement applicable obligations.

The situation on the ground has seriously hampered the capability of all humanitarian operators including UNRWA and other UN Agencies, to provide essential services. Reports about limitations to the freedom of movement also of UNRWA staff are of particular concern. The European Union urges the Government of Israel to ensure full and secure access for all diplomatic and humanitarian personnel and goods as required by principles and practices of International Humanitarian Law, and by the Road Map.

87 % of Gaza and 56 % of West Bank residents are unable to support themselves and their families. This means that they are totally dependent on outside international assistance. The deteriorating economic situation and increased poverty in the West Bank and especially in the Gaza Strip have created additional demand on UNRWA's services. This makes the role of UNRWA in providing essential services and humanitarian assistance to the Palestine refugees even more important during the current crisis and necessitates a vital role of donor support to UNRWA's appeals.

The Temporary International Mechanism is bringing in badly needed support. The TIM has now been extended for a further three months and to an even greater

number of vulnerable people, and the European Union is currently examining the modalities for its expansion. We encourage other donors to make full use of the mechanism in order to address the needs of the Palestinian people.

The EU is concerned about the financing gap that still exists in UNRWA's emergency programmes and remains committed in supporting its efforts to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian refugees.

The European Union also reiterates its call for an immediate resumption of transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues by Israel, as this would also have a significant impact on the Palestinian economy. We have called on Israel to consider resumption of such transfers via the TIM to alleviate the deteriorating economic and humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the West Bank.
Mr Chairman,

The European Union remains deeply concerned at the ongoing violence. It calls on the Palestinian leadership to bring an end to violence and terrorist activities, including the firing of rockets on Israeli territory. While recognising Israel's right to protect its citizens against terrorist attacks, the European Union remains deeply concerned at the continued Israeli operation in the Palestinian territories and deplores the loss of civilian life it has brought. The EU expresses its support to President Abbas and calls on the Palestinians to join his efforts towards national unity and the formation of a government with a platform reflecting the Quartet principles and allowing for early engagement. The EU calls on all Palestinian factions to end their internal strife. We call for an end to violence and for restraint from all sides.

The European Union urges Israel to reverse its settlement policy and to freeze all settlement activity, to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001 and to end land confiscation and the construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian land, all of which threaten to render the two-State solution physically impossible to implement. The EU remains particularly concerned by the settlement building and the construction of the separation barrier in and around East Jerusalem.

The European Union reaffirms its commitment to a negotiated two-State solution agreed between the parties which would result in an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours. It recalls the established EU position that the Union will not recognise any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties. We must bear in our minds that overriding goal is the early resumption of dialogue between the two parties with a view to re-launching negotiations on the basis of the Roadmap. As long as this conflict is not resolved, peace will not be secured anywhere in the region. The European Union reiterates its continuing support to Israeli and Palestinian efforts to advance the peace process.

The EU sincerely hopes that positive developments will soon be produced, leading without delay to a fair, stable and equitable solution to the Palestinian Refugees issue in the framework of a final and comprehensive permanent status agreement,

in line with relevant UN resolutions. Until then, the services provided by UNRWA remain essential to ensure a decent life to Palestinian refugees in the Middle East.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.