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General Debate on UNRWA

H.E. Ms. Tine Mørch Smith  
Ambassador  
Deputy Permanent Representative

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Chair,

In our Statement last year, we focused on how to deal with UNRWA's financial situation and the recurring budget deficits – this year projected at 20 percent of the General Fund. Extraordinary contributions from generous donors have yet again narrowed the gap, enabling UNRWA more or less to maintain operations according to plan throughout the budget year. But the structural and strategic challenges for UNRWA remain the same: The refugee population grows annually by 2.4 percent, and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future: Increased funding by the donors matching this increase is less likely, and a negotiated political solution to the refugee problem has still not been reached.

Chair,

We have to face the fact that we have still not been able to address the difficult questions we raised last year, namely that UNRWA's long-term financial challenges requires a structural change in three ways, in terms of how UNRWA is funded; how it operates; and how it cooperates with other stakeholders and partners.

First: The long-term solution to the financial challenge lies not within the Advisory Commission. The donor base must be further enhanced. Norway has over the last year engaged in UNRWA's efforts to attract new donors. We welcome new contributions from the Arab World, and the emerging powers, as well as generous efforts undertaken by traditional donors. Furthermore, Norway welcomes the constructive approach taken by host countries in informing about their

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own strong contribution in support of Palestine refugees. We strongly support UNRWA's efforts to engage new donors, and we will continue to cooperate closely with UNRWA to utilize the resources more effectively. In addition, Norway reiterates that it is our joint responsibility as members of the UN General Assembly to ensure that UNRWA becomes more properly funded over the UN regular budgets. We look forward to working with all member states to ensure that those increases are achieved at a substantial level over the next four biennia.

Second: A continuation of improvements as to how UNRWA operates is needed. We should stay focused on the continuing development of the organization through the "Sustaining Change" – the second critical phase of reform. Substantial improvements have taken place in UNRWA's economic management over the last year. These improvements were needed. Today, UNRWA rates among the top UN agencies in this field, and we congratulate the organization for this major achievement. However, further improvements in the quality of UNRWA's programs, particularly in education, health and relief to the poor, is needed if UNRWA is to serve Palestine refugees better. We need a strong UNRWA in the years to come, whatever the outcome of political talks.

Third: A reassessment of UNRWA's cooperation with all other stakeholders and partners is needed. An important first step would be to look for synergies in closer coordination with other UN agencies and humanitarian and development actors, including improved cooperation and coordination with the Palestinian Authority and host countries is needed. Without improvements, UNRWA will not be able to maintain its level of service delivery. As donors we have a particular responsibility to ensure that our collective effort and our contributions are spent in the most cost-efficient way possible, towards our common goal. It makes no sense if some organizations are over-funded, while others, equally important to achieving that goal, remain chronically underfunded.

Chair,

We need to develop new ideas. The human resource base in the refugee camps is underutilized. Innovative ideas are needed, as to how the camps can produce products and services, to improve income and living conditions for those staying there. One such idea would be to develop a pilot program for a camp-based strategy where key stakeholders, including private sector, can be a partner in improving economic production in the camps. Furthermore, as part of such a pilot, we should find a way of integrating the camp population with expert skills and graduate knowledge, to play a more active role in improving the life of the refugees. The refugee camps need to be producers. If they succeed, our financial assistance will have higher impact. Experiences from the Norwegian funded Gender Program in Gaza may be of relevance in this regard.

There is a growing recognition that better integrated approaches in service delivery will yield better economy in service deliveries in the camps. Better service delivery is a rightful demand from the refugees, and an integral part of their rights. We therefore need to look at how UNRWA can put these ideas into practice. In particular, Norway supports the work undertaken by UNRWA to improve the health service delivery.

Chair,

UNRWAs efforts to protect the rights of Palestine refugees under international law are essential in the search for a negotiated political solution. In that perspective, UNRWA's contribution towards our common goal for the Palestinian people, in particular Palestine refugees, is a cornerstone in the total activity directed towards the Palestinian people in the coming years.

Taking into consideration the significant and documented progress made in making Palestine ready for statehood, as documented at the AHLC-meetings in Brussels and New York earlier this year, let me underline the important role UNRWA is playing in service delivery for the Palestinian population in Gaza and at the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Without the service delivery of UNRWA, education, health services and social support system would significantly lag behind. UNRWA has over the last years been a significant important contributor in making Palestine ready for statehood. For that, Norway congratulates achievements and contributions made. Further improvements in the quality, targeting and efficiency of UNRWAs work in the occupied Palestinian territories, and in the camps, are necessary in order to develop the social fabric in these areas, and to improve the basic foundation for a Palestinian State.

Thank you Chair,