

UNITED NATIONS

RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR
PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST



NATIONS UNIES

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Letter to all staff from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Ms. Karen AbuZayd

The region in which we work is once again undergoing momentous change. In this complicated environment, I am, as ever, impressed by the commitment and dedication of our staff, who continue to deliver the services the Palestine refugees so dearly need efficiently and effectively. One often hears managers claim: our staff is our main resource. Nowhere is this truer than at UNRWA: were it not for the excellence of all those working at the Agency, our work would simply disappear into irrelevance.

The recent elections in the occupied Palestinian territory have been hailed by all observers as the free and fair expression of the will of the Palestinian people. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Kofi Annan, has praised the orderly conduct of these elections. UNRWA is proud to have modestly contributed to this success by allowing its schools and other facilities to be used as polling stations. I am pleased to confirm that the cooperation with the Palestinian authorities was extremely smooth at all stages of the process and that no untoward incident was reported during the time that our facilities were being used for this unusual but worthy process.

Here too, staff have been instrumental, sometimes by being directly involved in this facilitation, and always by maintaining a level of conduct beyond reproach. I note in particular that colleagues who wished to stand as candidates duly observed the Agency's rules and resigned from their posts before putting forward their nominations. I thank them for that, fully realizing the degree of personal sacrifice that this entails, and I salute their commitment to the future of their country.

I can well understand the questions raised by those who wonder why it is not possible to combine employment with UNRWA and active participation in local politics. But there lies the particularity of the United Nations: unlike a private company or a non-Governmental organization, our job is to fulfil a mandate given to us by the international community as a whole. That mandate is funded by voluntary contributions of Member States. These countries trust us to do our work effectively, and to do it in their collective name. It follows that we must at all times maintain a neutral and impartial attitude to events that surround us. This may be easier said than done, but it is crucial if we are to continue to enjoy the trust of so many different partners. In his letter to you dated 6 June 2002, my predecessor, Peter Hansen, reminded you of various aspects regarding this issue. I fully subscribe to his views and believe it is important to read them carefully from time to time.

I look forward to working with you, continuing to provide the humanitarian and human development services to the refugees whom we are here to serve.



Karen Koning AbuZayd
Commissioner-General