



# Malaysia

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*Permanent Mission to the United Nations*

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STATEMENT BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON

AGENDA ITEM 75: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS  
AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST

AT

THE FOURTH COMMITTEE OF  
THE 59<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NEW YORK  
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Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I should like to express my delegation's sincere appreciation to Mr. Peter Hansen, Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for presenting an insightful and comprehensive report on the work of the Agency during the period under review: between 1 July 2003 and 30 June 2004, as contained in document A/59/13. My delegation commends his unflinching commitment and outstanding work and that of the staff members of the Agency in the service of the Palestine refugees, who have now increased to almost 4.2 million in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic as well as in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. I should also thank Mr. Hans Jacob Frydenlund for presenting the Report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, as contained in document A/59/442.

2. The Report of the Commissioner-General contains very disturbing figures and incidents concerning the continuing deterioration in the political, economic and social situations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In a nutshell, these include the escalation of armed attacks, extensive Israeli military incursions into refugee camps particularly in the Gaza Strip, displacement of an increasing number of Palestinians following the destruction of their homes, increasing high levels of poverty, deteriorating health conditions, disruption of educational programmes, as well as increasing exhaustion of the capacity of the Palestinian population to sustain itself in the face of continuous decline in economic and social conditions since September 2000. For instance, a total of 970 refugee shelters were demolished, rendering over 9,416 Palestinians homeless, during the period under review. Unemployment rate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory at the end of 2003 stood at approximately 25 per cent, even excluding unpaid family labour and a marked increase in "self-employment". Those conditions have had a particularly severe effect on Palestine refugees, who are often among the poorest and most vulnerable part of the population. These have warranted additional engagement by the Agency. These must be a concern to the international community.

Mr. Chairman,

3. The deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has been further aggravated by the construction of the Separation Wall by Israel in the Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem. The Wall has been declared illegal by the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinion last July. The excessive regimes associated with the Wall, namely internal and external closures, curfews and other restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip should be removed. The restrictions have led to the loss of access by the Palestine population to employment and income as well as access to essential goods and services. Of equal concern is that those restrictions have had a serious impact on the ability of UNRWA to move staff and humanitarian assistance to those in urgent need. Obstacles to the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance to refugees have remained in place as the conflict and level of violence have persisted. The international community must prevail upon Israel to take urgent measures to remove those restrictions placed especially on the movement of Agency staff and goods, in keeping with international law and the agreements between UNRWA and the Government of Israel.

4. Malaysia reaffirms its support to and admiration for the staff members of UNRWA for their resolute and effective response to the continuing emergency humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Malaysia commends their dedication and hard work under extreme circumstances and constraints. While we take comfort over the absence of casualties among staff members of UNRWA during the reporting period, we take serious exception over the revelation in the Report of the Commissioner General that the lives of no less than 54 of them had been put at serious risk last July as a result of Israeli military operations in northern Gaza Strip. Malaysia stresses the pressing need to respect the integrity of the United Nations and the immunity of its staff and to ensure their safety and security, particularly in the case of humanitarian staff courageously operating in areas of conflict, as stated in Security Council resolution 1502 (2003) of 26 August 2003.

5. Malaysia recognizes that UNRWA has made serious efforts to conduct an effective programme of delivery of emergency assistance to the affected refugees and that the Agency's periodic reports have been distributed to donors to inform them of the implementation. Malaysia believes that the measures that have been identified and implemented to strengthen and improve the coordinating mechanisms to respond to humanitarian emergency situations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory would bear the desired results. The existing close cooperation between UNRWA and a number of United Nations agencies, including Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNTSO, WFP and WHO, has proven to be beneficial in ameliorating the quality of life of Palestine refugees. Malaysia also recognizes the crucial role of the NGO community, in particular the International Committee of the Red

Cross and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society. Malaysia encourages the further enhancement of such cooperation and coordination.

Mr. Chairman,

6. Malaysia underscores the crucial importance of the Agency's regular budget in the implementation of its activities. Malaysia notes that for 2003, contributions amounting to over US\$ 412 million had been received. Malaysia stresses the importance of a steady and predictable growth in contributions to the regular budget in the coming years, which is indispensable if the Agency is to respond adequately to the real needs of the refugees in the five fields of operations. Malaysia commends continuous efforts by the Agency to mobilize contributions from the international community to its Emergency Appeals. However, we are concerned at the gradually decreasing level of contributions to this initiative as the *Intifada* enters its fourth year. In 2003, contributions received only managed to cover 47 per cent of the needs, while the proportion for 2004 stood at 32 per cent as of 30 June. Continued support to the UNRWA Emergency Appeal is crucial to the survival of the Palestine refugees.

7. Malaysia recognizes that donors are becoming increasingly reluctant to fund construction of new homes for refugees whose shelters have been destroyed by the Israeli Defence Forces, since such contributions could perhaps be seen as making them complicit in the violations of international humanitarian law committed by the Occupying Power. We share the Agency's view that, while the wide-scale destruction could well be considered contrary to international humanitarian law, it would be particularly ironic if this position of principle were applied to the sole detriment of the refugees and other civilian victims. In this connection, Malaysia appeals to the international community to do its utmost to enhance contributions to the Agency's emergency programmes. Malaysia also calls upon UNRWA to continue to examine closely its emergency programmes and priorities and its analysis of its emergency needs, and to explore further options to widen the donor base and increase donations to fulfil the Agency's and the refugees' needs.

8. Malaysia recognizes the vital role of UNRWA in forestalling a more alarming humanitarian disaster through its work in alleviating the plight of the Palestine refugees. In the last 54 years UNRWA has done a lot in providing education, health and social services to the refugees and in improving the socio-economic conditions of the refugees. The Agency has contributed greatly towards humanizing the lives of the Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and lessening their sufferings while they struggle to survive under desperate and impoverished conditions. Malaysia recognizes the vital role the Agency plays in providing the refugees with essential services. Malaysia is pleased with the various rehousing and infrastructure projects undertaken, inter alia, in the Jenin, Neirab, Tel el Sultan, Khan Danoun, Khan Eshie and Khan Younis camps, as well as the Palestine refugee records project which are currently underway.

9. UNRWA is the primary source of humanitarian relief assistance to Palestine refugees. Therefore, we believe that the Agency's activities constitute an essential component in the struggle for and realization of peace in the Middle East. Its continued operations in the region is crucial now more than ever to address the mounting humanitarian crisis among the Palestinians, particularly with the intensification of Israeli military operations against Palestinians and the devastating impact upon them of Israeli policies and practices. It is therefore necessary that the international community remains firmly committed to carrying out its shared responsibility to assist and provide the vital support required by UNRWA to continue to effectively fulfill its mandate.

10. Finally, Malaysia views the insistence by Israel that an UNRWA ambulance was used to transport a *Qassam* rocket recently as utterly malicious and uncalled for. Such an allegation could only mean that it was aimed to undermine and discredit the courageous and commendable work and efforts of UNRWA. Malaysia is pleased with the conclusion of the Investigation Team of the United Nations Secretariat, which had inquired into the allegation, that such activity had never occurred and was unjustified as the alleged object was in fact a folding stretcher of the type carried as normal equipment in UNRWA ambulances. While the Government of Israel, following the visit by the Investigation Team, was sensible enough to admit that it had wrongly identified the folding stretcher as a *Qassam* Rocket and had publicly withdrawn the allegations, it has not tendered any apology to UNRWA and the United Nations. Malaysia joins the Secretary-General in calling upon Israel to address any issue of this nature through normal diplomatic channels.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.