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STATEMENT BY
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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF MALAYSIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON AGENDA ITEM 51: THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY
FOR PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST

AT THE FOURTH COMMITTEE OF
THE 68TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NEW YORK, 7 NOVEMBER 2013

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to Mr. Filippo Grandi, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for the Palestine Refugees in the Near East, for his report submitted to the General Assembly as contained in document A/68/13. Allow me also to take this opportunity to express Malaysia's appreciation to the outgoing Commissioner-General, for his commitment in leading UNRWA in its relief efforts and excellent work. Malaysia wishes to associate itself with the statement delivered by Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement on this agenda item.

2. Malaysia commends the resolute commitment and outstanding work of the Commissioner-General and the entire staff members of UNRWA in the service of Palestinian refugees who have now increased to a staggering 5 million people in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. UNRWA's role in advocating protection and shelter toward Palestinian refugees is integral to ensure that they could acquire basic needs at the very least. In this regard, my delegation is encouraged by UNRWA's tireless dedication and hard work, in particular under extreme circumstances and constraints. Sadly, eight UNRWA staff members were killed in violence related to the Syrian conflict. Malaysia expresses its deepest sympathy to their families for their loss.

Mr. Chairman,

3. The report of UNRWA this year contains very disturbing figures and incidents concerning the deterioration in the political, economic, and security developments in all five fields of UNRWA's operation. It is of grave concern that conflict is increasingly encroaching on UNRWA camps with shelling and clashes continue to take place with a disturbing consistency. The situation in Syria had also affected the dire situation of UNRWA refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. Some alarming facts continue to haunt the international

community including Israel, the occupying Force's intensified illegal settlement in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; Israel's demolition of at least 600 Palestinian-owned structures, displacing at least 924 people and Israel's continued illegal construction of the separation wall in the occupied West Bank including in and around East Jerusalem which further aggravates the humanitarian situation.

4. In light of the dire situation in Syria, we also reiterate our concern that more than two thirds of Palestinian refugees amounting to approximately 235,000 who have seek shelter in UNRWA camps for decades have been displaced. These worrying conditions had inadvertently affected the Palestinian refugees severely as they struggle to acquire their daily needs. Palestinian refugees could not afford to purchase food and other essential commodities as their prices rose sharply. The unemployment rate among Palestinian refugees increased especially after the Syrian conflict and alongside Syrians, Palestine refugees' directly experienced conflict-related trauma, threats to their safety and displacement from their homes.

Mr. Chairman,

5. The worsening situation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip deliberately instigated by the occupying Power has posed a great threat to the survival of the Palestinian people, including Palestinian refugees that seek shelter under UNRWA camps. Malaysia condemns the flagrant violations of Israel, including the continued restriction of movement of UNRWA personnel and goods in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip which have undermined the Agency's ability to perform its responsibilities to the Palestinian refugees. These restrictions are inconsistent with the UN Charter, the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the UN and the relevant UN resolutions. The international community must urge Israel to take urgent measures to remove those restrictions placed especially on the movement of UNRWA's staff and goods, in keeping with international law and the agreements between UNRWA and Israel.

6. Despite the many challenges in performing its responsibilities including various restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupying Power, UNRWA has contributed greatly towards humanizing the lives of the Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West bank as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and lessening their sufferings while they struggle to make it through their daily lives. In this regard, my delegation expresses appreciation on the noble work of UNRWA in operating 694 elementary and preparatory schools across its five fields of operation, as well as eight secondary schools in Lebanon, providing free basic education for around half a million Palestinian refugee children.

Mr. Chairman,

7. The regular budget of UNRWA is crucial in order to enable the Agency to implement its activities effectively. However, with a reported budget shortfall of USD 353.3 million, this alarming financial situation had adversely affected the Agency's ability to carry out the various fields of operations of UNRWA especially in the area of education, health, social services, youth engagement, microfinance, and infrastructure and camp improvement to 5 million Palestinian refugees. Malaysia supports the continuous efforts by the Agency to mobilize contributions from the international community. In this regard, my delegation notes that UNRWA continues to examine closely its programmes, priorities and needs, and to

explore further options to widen the donor base. In this regard, we are concerned that the level of response has stagnated, thereby gradually decreasing the level of contributions to this initiative. In this connection, Malaysia appeals member States to continue to support the work of UNRWA by enhancing their contributions to the Agency, as it is crucial to the well-being of the Palestine refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

8. Malaysia has been one of the staunchest supporters of the Palestinian cause, and in this regard we have continuously supported the work of UNRWA. My delegation is pleased with the excellent relations between the Government of Malaysia and UNRWA. We warmly welcomed the visit of the Commissioner General to Malaysia in September 2013, a testament that both Malaysia and UNRWA share the common goal in upholding the welfare of Palestinian refugees. Last year, Malaysia contributed USD1.2 million to UNRWA in response to the Agency's appeal. This year, we are pleased to pledge a contribution of USD250,000 to UNRWA, to assist the Agency in helping the Palestinian refugees affected by dire situations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Mr. Chairman,

9. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is the primary source of humanitarian relief assistance to Palestine refugees. Malaysia recognizes the vital role of UNRWA in forestalling a more alarming humanitarian disaster through its work in alleviating the plight of the Palestinian refugees. Its critical work furthermore demonstrates in a tangible way, the concern and sympathy of the international community, and that we have not forgotten the dire plight of the Palestine refugees who have been severely disadvantaged and deprived of justice, human rights and fundamental freedoms and continue to struggle to survive under desperate and impoverished conditions. The work by the Agency serves as a testament to the humanitarian commitment that we have pledged. Malaysia strongly affirms that the Agency's continued operations in the region remains crucial. While the international community has a collective role to play in finding a solution to the Palestinian question, it is our shared responsibility to assist and provide the vital support required by UNRWA to effectively fulfill its mandate to the Palestinian refugees.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.