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## **STATEMENT**

**BY**

**H.E. MR. NEVILLE GERTZE**

**AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE**

**72<sup>ND</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY**

**FOURTH COMMITTEE**

**AGENDA ITEM 53:**

**“UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY  
FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST”**

**NEW YORK  
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Mr. Chairperson,

1. We thank you for organizing this important debate on the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, for his informative briefing.
2. My delegation aligns itself with the Statement delivered by the distinguished Permanent Representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Chairperson,

3. Since its creation in 1949, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency has provided education, primary health-care consultations, social safety net assistance, learning and skills training for youth, microfinance loans and shelter rehabilitation or construction assistance to Palestine refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and Jordan.
4. As the conflict in Syria continues and the occupation of the Palestinian territories enters its 50<sup>th</sup> year, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency has remained a stabilizing factor in the region. It has also, as stated by the Secretary-General in his report published earlier this year, mitigated extremism and contributed to peace and security in the Middle East region.
5. This past year, the Agency notably provided education to 515,260 children and over 8.5 million primary health-care consultations. UNRWA also delivered social safety net assistance, including cash and food, to over 254,000 individuals. In Syria, cash and food assistance continued to be a principal part of the humanitarian interventions there, with 430,000 refugees reached.
6. In Gaza, the now decade-long blockade continues to severely impact the lives of those living there. Here again, UNRWA provides children with access to education through 267 schools, of which 71.2% operate on a double-shift basis. The Agency also continues to assist in the reconstruction efforts following the hostilities in July and August 2014.

Mr. Chairperson,

7. Namibia recognizes the significant steps that have been taken by the Commissioner-General and the Agency to strengthen financial control and budgetary regulation. Despite this, as of August 2017, the Agency's financial shortfall on its programme budget stood at \$126.5 million. This is equivalent to approximately two months of operational costs. Over the past few years, funding has been unable to keep pace with the increased refugee needs and the uptake in services. As noted by the Report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, these budgetary difficulties are "exacerbating concerns among refugees about the ability of the international community to address their most basic needs".
8. It is important to highlight that today there are more than 5.3 million Palestine refugees. They thus account for approximately 25% of refugees worldwide. By 2020, the Palestine refugee population is expected to reach 6.4 million people. The demands placed on UNRWA, and therefore its financial needs, will only increase in the years to come.

Mr. Chairperson,

9. This year marked the 50<sup>th</sup> year of occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel. As the number of Palestine refugees continues to increase and the demands on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency continue to grow, we call on the Israeli government to cease all construction of settlements on occupied territories and to end their ongoing destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure. We also call on all parties to return to the tables of negotiation and dialogue so that steps towards peace and development can be taken, to ultimately achieve a two-state solution.
10. I would once again like to take this opportunity to thank the Commissioner-General and all 30,000 UNRWA staff for their dedication in helping all Palestine refugees through their essential work.

I thank you.

