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To: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

22 September 2021

To whom it may concern,

The information in this letter is provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (“UNRWA” or “the Agency”) at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (“UNHCR”) for the purposes of describing the Agency’s mandate and services that it is able to provide, and limitations thereto. The information provided is of a general nature and does not pertain to the circumstances of any particular individual.

UNRWA was established on 8 December 1949 by resolution 302 (IV) of the United Nations General Assembly to carry out direct relief and works programmes for Palestine refugees following their displacement and dispossession as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict.ⁱ In the absence of a just and durable solution to their plight, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA’s mandate, most recently by resolution 74/83 “Assistance to Palestine refugees” of 13 December 2019 extending it until June 2023.ⁱⁱ

While UNRWA’s mandate focuses on Palestine refugees, it also extends to other persons of concern to UNRWA who are eligible to register with the Agency for the receipt of services as per the Agency’s regulatory framework and eligibility criteria contained in the UNRWA Consolidated Eligibility and Registration Instructions (“CERI”) of 2009, including, among others, “non-registered persons displaced as a result of the 1967 and subsequent hostilities”.ⁱⁱⁱ Today, approximately 5.7 million women, children and men are registered with the Agency as Palestine refugees. A further approximately 700,000 persons are also registered with the Agency as eligible to receive services only.^{iv}

UNRWA’s fields of operations are Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza. The Agency does not have a mandate to operate outside of its five fields, and therefore, other than maintaining regional representative offices, does not have offices anywhere else. UNRWA pursues its mission within its five fields of operations through the provision of humanitarian assistance and mandated services.

UNRWA mandated services are concerned with:

- Basic education,
- Primary health care,
- Relief and social services,

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- Infrastructure and camp improvement, and microcredit, and,
- Emergency assistance, including in situations of armed conflict.

UNRWA basic education and primary health services are available on a principle of universality, whilst eligibility criteria are applied to other types of assistance, including vocational and technical training, hospitalization, social safety net programmes, and emergency relief. Service usage fluctuates as a function of demographic changes and prevailing socio-economic conditions, with demand typically increasing during times of hardship and crisis.

The Agency contributes to the protection of Palestine refugees both through its service delivery and by advocating for their rights with relevant stakeholders. UNRWA does not have a mandate to seek durable solutions for Palestine refugees.

UNRWA does not manage refugee camps and is not responsible for protecting the physical safety or security of Palestine refugees or maintaining law and order in UNRWA's five fields of operations. The Agency cannot guarantee any individual's physical security. Ensuring the physical security of Palestine refugees residing in any of UNRWA's five fields is the responsibility of the respective host state or authority.

UNRWA registers Palestine refugees for the purpose of receiving UNRWA services and assistance based on established criteria for registration, which are set out in the above-mentioned CERI. The Agency accepts new applications from persons who wish to be registered as Palestine refugees.^v Registration with UNRWA based on the CERI criteria does not confer any legal status, nor does it operate as a form of personal identification, proof of nationality or lack thereof. The host state or authorities – not UNRWA – will control the legal status of Palestine refugees within state borders, including their right to lawfully enter or reside within the relevant area and authority to access public services and other entitlements, including the right to work, right to freedom of association, access to courts, and social protection schemes, including access to social security. Registration with UNRWA does not place an obligation on the host state or authorities to provide government services to Palestine refugees, or legal status through which they may access the above-mentioned rights. UNRWA is not mandated to pronounce on whether an individual is a national of any country and does not operate as a civil registry office.

Operating within a resource-constrained environment, and reliant on voluntary funding, UNRWA allocates its limited resources among the services provided to Palestine refugees, prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable. The level of services that UNRWA is able to provide depends on the Agency's funding situation, which is largely dependent on voluntary contributions by States, and may not correspond to the needs of Palestine

refugees. The Agency's funding situation, which has steadily deteriorated over the past several years, reached a critical point in 2020. UNRWA received US\$ 940 million, US\$ 649 million short of total requirements and US\$ 60 million less than in 2019. The Agency's financial situation remains uncertain with a shortfall of US\$ 100 million as at mid-September 2021.^{vi}

As regards the situation of Palestine refugees in UNRWA fields of operation, the Agency regularly issues reports, emergency appeals, statements and press releases containing relevant information on political, economic and security developments as well as operational and organizational developments. These are all available on UNRWA's website at the following link: <https://www.unrwa.org/resources>.^{vii} In addition, a list of general questions and answers about UNRWA, currently available in Arabic, English and German, is also available on the UNRWA website: <https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are/frequently-asked-questions>.

In closing, the Agency takes this opportunity to note that nothing in or related to this letter shall be deemed a waiver, express or implied, of any of the privileges and immunities accorded to UNRWA under international law.

Sincerely,

A Peyró

Ana Peyró Llopis
Acting Director, Department of Legal Affairs
UNRWA

ⁱ United Nations General Assembly resolution 302 (IV), "Assistance to Palestine refugees", 8 December 1949, para. 7.

ⁱⁱ United Nations General Assembly resolution 74/83, "Assistance to Palestine refugees", 13 December 2019, para. 7.

ⁱⁱⁱ UNRWA, Consolidated Eligibility and Registration Instructions, 2009, available at:

<https://www.unrwa.org/resources/strategy-policy/consolidated-eligibility-and-registration-instructions>

^{iv} The latest figures can be found in the UNRWA Registered Population Dashboard, available at:

<https://www.unrwa.org/what-we-do/relief-and-social-services/unrwa-registered-population-dashboard>

^v For the purpose of registration with UNRWA, new applicants are required to provide source documents that demonstrate eligibility for registration. The online registration form is available at: <https://www.unrwa.org/what-we-do/eligibility-registration>

^{vi} UNRWA, Official Statement, "Exchange of views with the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee, introductory remarks of the UNRWA Commissioner-General", 17 September 2021, available at:

<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/exchange-views-european-parliament-foreign-affairs-committee>

^{vii} For instance, the Agency's annual operational report, covering the calendar year 2020, is available at:

<https://www.unrwa.org/resources/about-unrwa/annual-operational-report-2020>.