



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.

# 140<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly

## Doha (Qatar), 6 – 10 April 2019



## UNRWA Statements Delivered at the 140<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly

### 1. Delivered by Mr. Abdi Aynte, Director of Strategic Partnerships

Honorable members of Parliaments, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentleman,

It gives me a great pleasure to address you today on behalf of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, commonly known as UNRWA. The agency's Commissioner General, Mr. Pierre Krahenbuhl regrets that he couldn't join you today due to prior commitments, but sends his sincere appreciation for the invitation to this important conference.

Established by the UN General Assembly 70 years ago, UNRWA is very unique among UN agencies for providing quasi state services to more than five million Palestine refugees scattered across the Middle East, in places like Gaza, West Bank including East Jerusalem, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Mr. Chairman,

I sincerely congratulate you for choosing education as the theme of the 140<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It is clearly a profound tribute to the powerful role that education plays in global peace and prosperity.

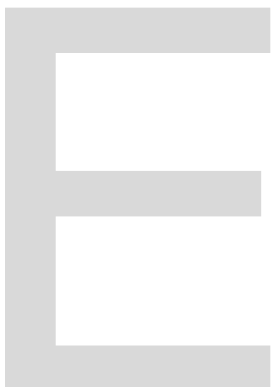
For the victims of protracted displacement, such as Palestine refugees, education is by far the single most important harbinger of hope, and the surest way to lift them out of despair and poverty.

As part of UNRWA's mandate to assist and protect the rights of Palestine refugees, we provide quality education to over half a million girls and boys in more than 700 schools. These students—and by extension their communities—value this service more than anything else.

More than two million Palestinians have graduated from our schools over the past seven decades. Many of them are leaders in private and public sectors across the world. And our education system is recognized globally for not only its quality, but also its vitality in human development. In a recent report, the World Bank has called UNRWA's education system "a global gift to humanity".

Global because UNRWA's education system is funded by member states of the United Nations who recognize that, in doing so, they are investing in the future of generations of displaced communities. And for that, we are deeply grateful for the partnership and trust many of your countries have bestowed upon us over the years.

In addition to our education program, we also provide healthcare services to Palestine refugees. More than three million Palestine refugees receive life-saving medical care at our 150 clinics on regular basis.



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These services are proudly delivered by a strong and dedicated staff of over 30,000 who are 98 percent Palestine refugees themselves. They are teachers, medical doctors, nurses and social workers who are working tirelessly in some of the most challenging environments such as Gaza and Syria.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

As the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nakba—the original forced displacement of Palestinians—approaches next month, we are all reminded by the renewed urgency to solve this conflict in a just and durable manner. UNRWA has been a witness to the historic injustice and plight of Palestine refugees, and has a responsibility to sound the alarm in the face deteriorating humanitarian situation.

For far too long, Palestinians have been told by the international community to have a faith in the political and diplomatic peace processes of the last 30 years. And they have been patiently waiting for a just and lasting solution since then, while they continued to endure multiple armed conflicts, occupation and a stifling blockade.

However, their plight is now exacerbated by the lack of political progress, the announcements on Jerusalem and the dramatic cuts to UNRWA's funding last year, which posed an existential threat to our ability to implement our mandate. Today, there is an overwhelming sense of siege among Palestine refugees.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNRWA has been a linchpin of stability in the Middle East—a region beset by historic problems and multiple new conflicts, precisely because we were able to give hope to generations of Palestine refugees through quality education and other life-saving assistance.

Despite the extraordinary financial and political challenges last year, we were able to preserve our education service with the support and solidarity of many of your countries. And together with you, we are even more determined to ensure that half a million Palestine refugee children go to school every single day.

Last year, we launched a global fundraising campaign called #DignityIsPriceless to raise awareness about the plight of Palestine refugees and mobilize resources in new and innovative ways. We partnered with many of your countries and institutions through traditional and non-traditional means such as Ramadan campaigns, zakat funds and Waqf development fund recently endorsed by the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation. We are grateful to you for enabling us to diversify our sources of funding, so that we can collectively continue to send a powerful signal to Palestine refugee children that their education is not only protected but celebrated.

As our Commissioner General says, the students in our schools understand better than we do ourselves, that education is NOT an act of charity, but a fundamental right for all children.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

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I now have the honor to introduce to two formidable young leaders who are members of our student parliamentarians: Ahmed Baker and Hannan Abu Asbah. They will share their experiences as Palestine refugee children studying at UNRWA schools.

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### 2. Delivered by Mr. Ahmad Baker, Student Parliamentarian

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great honor for me to be amongst you today as a Palestine refugee student from Jordan at the 140<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Inter Parliamentary Union. My name is Ahmad Baker, and I am 15 years old. Just like 5.4 million other Palestine refugees, I am away from my home country. While you were elected by citizens of your home country, I was elected by students of UNRWA, which is home to me.

I am the president of the UNRWA Student Parliament in Jordan, and a member of the Agency-wide Student Parliament. Today, I represent the voices and aspirations of 532,000 boys and girls studying in more than 700 UNRWA schools in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank.

I had the privilege of representing my peers in several international events such as the League of Arab States and the United Nations General Assembly. But in fact I wasn't supposed to be here today, we had selected another member of the Agency-wide Student Parliament from Gaza to address you. Due to the current situation he couldn't get out of Gaza. But we are determined to bring the voices of our peers in Gaza here.

We did not ask to be refugees and we want the world to respect us for our skills and determination. We want to contribute to solutions and a better world. Nothing is more important to us than continuing our education. We have dreams and hopes like the rest of the children in this world, education is our right, and our horizon, please help us protect it.

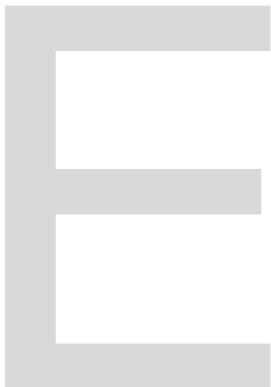
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### 3. Delivered by Ms. Hanan Abu Assba, Student Parliamentarian

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it's an honor for me today to stand before you here at the Assembly of the Inter Parliamentary Union representing more than half a million Palestinian refugee children studying in UNRWA schools. My name is Hanan Abu Assba, I am from the West Bank, and I am 14 years old. I am the President of the UNRWA Student Parliament in the West Bank, and also a member of the Agency-wide Student Parliament.

I came from the womb of suffering, where the sounds of bombs and bullets are heard in the streets of our camps in the West Bank. I have always woken up from my sleep, terrified by the sounds of loud knockings on our door, asking my father to open the door for our house to be inspected. From where I came, even schools are raided from time to time. For me and my peers, checkpoints are an ordinary part of our day on our way to school.

The education UNRWA offers us is our only hope to achieve our dreams and ambitions. It was thanks to my education that I was able to become a youth representative, and to learn about human rights, and realize that I need to advocate for them. I helped my peers and community through initiatives and campaigns organized by the School Parliaments. So, we don't see ourselves as victims, we are change makers.



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Last year, as many of you may know, we almost lost our right to education. Due to the funding crisis UNRWA schools were at risk of not opening. It was frightening but we never give up so we continued to advocate for our right to education and UNRWA schools opened on time this year. We never want to have this basic right taken away from us, therefore we would like to ask you to support us protect our right to education and our right to peace.

Thank you!

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