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UNRWA

PRESS STATEMENT

UNRWA LAUNCHES LARGEST EMERGENCY APPEAL SINCE CURRENT PROGRAMME BEGAN

The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) 2009 emergency appeal was launched by Deputy Commissioner General Filippo Grandi on Friday 5 December. Mr Grandi called for over \$275 million in order to meet the emergency needs of Palestine Refugees in Gaza and the West Bank in 2009. The appeal is the largest made since UNRWA began its current emergency programme in late 2000.

The size of the appeal reflects the persistent and deepening vulnerability for refugees across the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly families in Gaza and those in the West Bank affected by the Barrier and other movement restrictions. As Mr Grandi stated, "Some might think that we are asking for lots of money, but peace or meaningful progress towards peace is the only relief away from emergency funding."

At present, the Gaza strip is subject to a tight blockade, with poverty and unemployment at unprecedented levels and dependency on aid deepening; in the West Bank, the intricate system of Israeli closures has intensified, notwithstanding the removal of some obstacles to movement in recent months. The Palestinian economy is stagnant, its productive capacity waning, unable to generate sufficient employment to absorb a young and growing population or replace job losses in the Israeli labour market over the past several years. Levels of violence are high, and the rights and freedoms to which Palestinians are entitled to under international law continue to be routinely ignored and violated with impunity.

Palestine refugees, who account for around 40% of the total population of the oPt and a majority in Gaza, continue to bear the brunt of the protracted crisis. Refugees are one of the most vulnerable sectors of the population. As Mr Grandi stated during the launch, "We will fail the poorest of the poor, who are increasing in numbers, if their needs are not matched with existing resources."

The funds from the emergency appeal will be used for four main interventions, in order to alleviate the dire situation of Palestine refugees. These interventions will seek to provide social safety net assistance to alleviate the impact of increasing poverty and unemployment, guarantee access to essential public services, protect the rights of Palestine refugees, and improve UNRWA's capacity for coordination and delivery of emergency services.

Current developments leave little prospect of improvement in the immediate future, and the ranks

of those dependent on humanitarian assistance continues to grow. Unless there is real progress on the political track, which translates in to improvements in living conditions across the occupied Palestinian territory, UNRWA's needs- and those of the humanitarian community at large – will continue to rise.

Some 4.6 million Palestine refugees in UNRWA's five fields of operations – Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – are eligible for Agency services, including education, healthcare, social services, shelter, micro-credit loans and emergency aid. UNRWA employs nearly 30,000 staff, the vast majority of whom are Palestine refugees. UNRWA's operations are financed almost entirely by voluntary contributions from donors. The Agency's regular budget for 2008-2009 is \$1.1 billion, which covers the recurrent costs of the Agency's education, health and relief and social services activities.

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