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Chairman : Mr. Carl (Vice-Chairman) (Austria)
later : Mr. Droba (Vice-Chairman) (Slovakia)

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The meeting was called to order at 2.35 p.m.

Agenda item 75: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
(continued) (A/59/13, A/59/151, A/59/260, A/59/279 and A/59/442)

1. **Mr. Yamamoto** (Japan) said that the Middle East peace process was confronted with enormous difficulties and there was almost no prospect of resumption of negotiations. Japan strongly urged Israel to exercise maximum self-restraint, the Palestinians to make the utmost efforts to control the extremists and to produce tangible results in that regard and both parties to implement their obligations under the roadmap. Japan encouraged the Government of Israel to proceed with a full withdrawal from Gaza in coordination with the Palestinian Authority, as part of the process of implementation of the roadmap. In view of the current difficulties, the staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) deserved praise for their courageous efforts, which at times involved risking their lives. The tense situation had been further constraining UNRWA's activities. Japan called on the Israeli authorities to allow UNRWA access to all locations related to its humanitarian activities. Although the separation wall was supposed to stop terrorists, its construction not only had a negative impact on the livelihood of the Palestinians, but also prejudged the end result of negotiations. Japan expected Israel to respect the International Court of Justice advisory opinion of July 2004.

2. Japan has been contributing to UNRWA since 1953. In January 2004, the Government of Japan had announced a donation of US\$5.9 million, which had included an emergency grant of US\$1,513,200 to support UNRWA's emergency activities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The grant had been used to procure equipment and supplies for UNRWA's health centres in Gaza, provide mobile medical services for 700,000 Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and distribute self-teaching materials to 190,000 Palestinian primary school students in Gaza. At the regular informal meeting of major donor countries and host authorities (MDM) of October 2004, Japan had also announced a donation of US\$4.8 million to UNRWA for launching two projects in Lebanon:

construction and furnishing of 24 classrooms, and the Japanese scholarship programme to Palestinian women for higher academic studies. In the Syrian Arab Republic, a project consisting in the construction of computer laboratories and multi-purpose rooms in six UNRWA school buildings and the renovation of the learning resource centre at Yarmouk would soon start. In March 2004, Japan had also contributed 500 million yen to UNRWA for the distribution of wheat flour to refugee families registered as special hardship cases and for the programme benefiting nursing mothers and pregnant women. Contributions by the Japanese Government to the UNRWA regular budget and other UNRWA projects implemented since the 1993 Oslo Agreement had amounted to more than US\$220 million. Japan was paying close attention to UNRWA's management of its budget and operations and commended its reform efforts, but the secretariat of UNRWA should make further improvements in order to achieve cost-effective management and operations.

3. **Mr. Rastam Mohd Isa** (Malaysia) said that the continuing deterioration of the political, economic and social situation in the occupied Palestinian territories had particularly affected the refugees, who had increased to almost 4.2 million and constituted the poorest and most vulnerable section of the population. The humanitarian situation had been aggravated by the construction of the separation wall in and around East Jerusalem. The wall had been declared illegal by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion of July 2004. Restrictions associated with the wall, such as internal and external closures, curfews and other repressive measures imposed by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, had seriously affected the ability of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) UNRWA to move staff and humanitarian assistance to those in urgent need, and should be removed. The international community must prevail upon Israel to take urgent measures to lift those restrictions, in keeping with international law and existing agreements between UNRWA and the Government of Israel.

4. Malaysia reaffirmed its support for the UNRWA staff and commended their resolute and effective response to the continuing humanitarian emergency situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. While there had been no casualties among them during the

reporting period, Malaysia took exception to the fact that the lives of no less than 54 UNRWA staff members had been at serious risk in July 2004 as a result of Israeli military operations in the northern part of the Gaza Strip. Malaysia stressed the need to respect the immunity of United Nations staff and ensure their security, particularly in the case of humanitarian personnel operating in areas of conflict, as stated in Security Council resolution 1502 (2003). The measures that UNRWA had implemented to strengthen coordinating mechanisms for responding to humanitarian emergency situations in the occupied Palestinian territory would produce the desired results, as close cooperation with various United Nations agencies had allowed to improve living conditions for the refugees. The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), particularly the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), was also crucial.

5. UNRWA's regular budget was of key importance for its activities. Although in 2003 contributions had amounted to over US\$412 million, a steady and predictable growth of contributions to the regular budget was indispensable to enable UNRWA to meet the real needs of the refugees in all of its areas of operation. Contributions received had covered only 47 per cent of needs in 2003 and only 32 per cent of needs as of 30 June 2004. For fear that they could be regarded complicit in violations against international humanitarian law, donors were becoming increasingly reluctant to fund construction of new homes for refugees whose shelters had been destroyed by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) committed by the occupying power. It would be ironic if that position of principle were taken only to the detriment of the refugees and other civilian victims. The international community should do its utmost to enhance contributions to the UNRWA emergency programmes, while UNRWA should continue to examine its priorities and its needs, and to explore further options to widen the donor base.

6. For 54 years, UNRWA had provided education, health and social services to the refugees, helping to humanize their lives and alleviate their plight. The various rehousing and infrastructure projects, and the Palestine refugee records project, which were currently under way, were vital. UNRWA was the primary source of assistance to Palestine refugees, and its activities constituted an essential component in the struggle for peace in the Middle East, particularly in view of the

intensification of Israeli military operations against Palestinians. Lastly, Malaysia viewed Israel's insistence that an UNRWA ambulance had been recently used to transport a Qassam rocket as utterly uncalled for and aimed at discrediting UNRWA's commendable work. The United Nations Secretariat investigation team, which had inquired into the allegation, had concluded that such activity had never occurred and the object in question had been a folding stretcher. Although the Government of Israel had admitted that it had been wrongly and publicly withdrawn the allegations, it had tendered no apology to UNRWA or the United Nations. Malaysia joined the Secretary-General in calling upon Israel to address any issue of that nature through normal diplomatic channels.

7. **Ms. El Alaoui** (Morocco) referred to the grave situation in the Middle East, which had resulted from the intensification of restrictions imposed by Israel and affecting Palestinian refugees not only in the camps, but also in the host countries. The refugees' condition was deteriorating, because the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) did not have sufficient funds. Israeli practices were too numerous to be listed in a short statement, but mention should be made of massacres of civilians, excessive use of force, collective punishments, assassinations and demolition of dwellings, which had surpassed all precedents. The international community should support humanitarian assistance to the refugees, Israel should allow UNRWA to operate and the donor countries should increase their financial support to meet emergency needs. In fact, 36,000 Palestinian refugees were victims of a veritable blockade, as Israel, contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which had pronounced the separation wall illegal, continued its construction, thereby further impoverishing and isolating the families living in the vicinity and posing additional obstacles to UNRWA's efforts to assist them. In that context, Morocco hoped that UNRWA's mandate would be extended and awaited with interest the outcome of the discussions on the Agency's medium-term plan.

8. **Mr. Nguyen Van Bao** (Viet Nam) said that his delegation appreciated the efforts that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had made to fulfil its mandate under General Assembly resolution 302

(IV) of 8 December 1949. Over the past five decades, 25,000 staff members had been working tirelessly for the Palestine refugees, and UNRWA activities were extremely important in view of the continuing deterioration of the political, economic and social situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, where over half of the Palestinian population continued to live below the poverty line. UNRWA had also pursued its internal management reform process and organized the first major conference since its inception to strengthen its relations with the stakeholders. The Commissioner-General's report (A/59/3) showed that the construction of the separation wall or fence, internal closures, curfews and other restrictions imposed by Israel in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip limited the Palestinian population's mobility and affected their daily life and future. Such measures not only deprived the population of access to employment, income, essential goods and services, but also reduced UNRWA's ability to carry out its humanitarian functions. Damages to UNRWA infrastructure and facilities were a further cause for concern. Such negative measures must be stopped. It was necessary to respect the integrity of the United Nations and the immunities of its staff and to ensure that UNRWA performed its difficult task under safe conditions.

Mr. Droba (Slovakia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

9. **Ms. Qwabe** (South Africa) said that the report of Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) confirmed the dire situation faced by the Palestinian refugees because of the repressive policies of the Israeli Government. For more than fifty years, since UNRWA had become operational, the Member States of the United Nations had condemned the occupying power and appealed to it to reconsider its policies, but to no avail. In all those years, UNRWA had been a pillar of strength to the Palestinian refugees, bringing relief and a glimmer of hope to the suffering masses, particularly women and children, who had fled their homes in the face of the Israeli Government's attacks. The international community should hold discussions and redouble its efforts to find a solution to that problem. The humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and Gaza was not the result of a natural disaster - as the images seen over the last months might suggest - but a situation imposed by Israel, whose policies included measures of collective punishment of

a civilian population that were expressly prohibited in the Fourth Geneva Convention. Such acts provoked retaliation, resulting in an endless cycle of violence. Accordingly, South Africa called on Israel to allow free passage of deliveries of essential goods and services to the Palestinian territory and free movement of people to their places of employment.

10. UNRWA's efforts to provide basic services to the Palestinians and to promote income-generating activities at a time when the Palestinian economy continued to deteriorate, while its staff was being continuously harassed or even killed, were laudable. Tribute should also be paid to the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic for their continued support to Palestinian refugees. South Africa noted with concern the precarious financial situation of UNRWA and would continue its endeavours to support its activities within available means. The humanitarian situation was inseparable from the political context of the Middle East. South Africa was concerned over the continuing loss of innocent civilian lives, both Israeli and Palestinian, as a result of suicide bombings and excessive retaliatory use of force, which could only increase instability, and held that the roadmap provided a useful framework for the resumption of a political process aimed at a peaceful resolution of the conflict. To that end, South Africa reiterated its support for the struggle of the Palestinian people for the right to self-determination and urged all parties to the conflict not to allow extremism and violence to derail the peace process.

11. **Mr. Frydenlund** (Norway) noted that the human cost of the situation to the Palestinian population had reached a peak during the recent Israeli operation "Days of Penitence". Various United Nations agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had warned that violence, humiliation and poverty were pushing the Palestinian population into a deep crisis. Accordingly, the services and emergency aid provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) played an indispensable role and it was necessary to provide the agency with the capacity and resources it needed to carry out the tasks assigned to it by the General Assembly. So far, UNRWA had received a mere 45 percent of funding requested under the emergency appeal for 2004. Norway had made additional contributions to the Agency and urged fellow donors to follow suit. A further source of

concern was the fact that the cost of basic services in the occupied territories was rising sharply as a result of Israel Defence Forces (IDF) incursions, the closures regime and the continued construction of the barrier. No conflict was above international humanitarian law. The advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice had been a timely reminder of that fact. UNRWA should therefore be guaranteed full access to the occupied territories. Regrettably, UNRWA had been targeted with unfounded allegations concerning misconduct, while its staff deserved praise for their untiring efforts to assist Palestinian refugees under often dangerous circumstances. Norway supported the efforts of the Working Group on Stakeholder Relations, as the donors and the host countries had an interest in ensuring a high level of transparency and efficient use of resources.

12. **Mr. Al-Otaibi** (Kuwait) stressed the importance of the issue of Palestinian refugees. Despite the difficulties encountered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), it was necessary to increase the range of services that it offered in all areas concerned. Kuwait supported any initiative aimed at reforming UNRWA to increase its efficiency and would continue to support it through annual contributions. Israel should put an end to its repressive practices, including the illegal detention of UNRWA staff, which ran counter to the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and impeded the provision of humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees. UNRWA staff should enjoy the same prerogatives as other United Nations staff in the area and the Israeli Government should respect the principles of the peace process and accept its responsibility in implementing the roadmap.

13. **Mr. Bilgen** (Turkey) stated that the unrelenting cycle of violence and tragic events in the Middle East had eroded the headway made after a decade-long peace-process and brought more suffering at the expense of both peoples. All diplomatic efforts had proved to be futile as neither the Palestinians had realized their goal of statehood nor the Israelis had achieved long-desired security. The real tragedy, however, was the political, socioeconomic and psychological toll on the innocent of both societies. Turkey condemned all acts of terrorism, provocation and incitement to violence, and all policies of destruction and excessive use of force as tools for the collective punishment of a people. The roadmap,

endorsed by the international community through Security Council resolution 1515 (2003), provided the only viable way out of the current stalemate and to the materialization of the vision of two States, living side-by-side in peace. Having special historical and friendly ties with the Palestinians and Israel, Turkey urged both parties to assume their respective responsibilities under the roadmap.

14. UNRWA dealt with one of the most difficult issues of the Middle East question. Since its inception over half a century earlier, it had played a crucial role in providing education, health, relief and social services and other vital programmes to the most vulnerable segment of the Palestinian population, not only in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but also in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Its staff worked with exemplary dedication, increasingly risking their lives in performing their duties. Turkey therefore remained firmly committed to UNRWA's goals and mandate. The Commissioner-General's report drew a dark picture, especially about the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, where delivery of services was hindered and UNRWA-funded infrastructure and facilities had been damaged. Access had become a regular challenge for UNRWA, undercutting the efforts of the international community to meet the most basic needs of the Palestinian refugees. Moreover, the demolition and destruction policies as a method of collective punishment had drastically affected the economic circumstances faced by the Palestinian people.

15. UNRWA's financial situation continued to be a cause for concern. Despite improvement in 2004, its overall ability to maintain the level and quality of its services was problematic. Accordingly, Turkey endorsed the recommendations of the Working Group on Stakeholder Relations and stressed the responsibility of the international community to sustain UNRWA's services at an acceptable qualitative and quantitative level. Turkey welcomed initiatives to widen the spectrum of donors coupled with strict controls on expenditure. Establishment of new mechanisms to maximize the benefit of contributions would be of added value. Taking into consideration the conditions prevailing in the region, there was no doubt that a just and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict could only be attained through a negotiated political process. The roadmap offered the parties a unique opportunity and, if implemented through a

genuine dialogue and reconciliation process, withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank could provide the momentum needed for transition from violence towards stability. Turkey welcomed the decision of the Israeli Parliament to approve the plan for withdrawal, which would be significant only if carried out in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

16. **Ms. Yehia** (Sudan) said that the practices of the occupying power, such as persecution of defenceless persons, assassinations and dispersion of civilians, combined with the policies of closures and demolitions of dwellings and the construction of the separation wall, had aggravated the suffering of the Palestinian people. The silence of the international community, especially the United States, in view of Israeli crimes and the United Nations' incapacity to have its resolutions implemented contributed to the fact that Israel continued to commit acts of violence, such as the assassination of pupils in UNRWA schools. Sudan reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes pursuant to General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and their right to remedy for the moral and material damages suffered. The international community, the donor countries, the United Nations and the specialized agencies should provide assistance for future UNRWA activities in the occupied Palestinian territories and the neighbouring countries hosting refugees.

17. **Mr. Muhith** (Bangladesh) stated that the restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had a serious impact on the ability of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to move staff and humanitarian assistance to those in urgent need. For decades, UNRWA had provided education, healthcare, social services and emergency aid to Palestinian refugees and was currently the main provider of basic services to over 4.1 million registered Palestinian refugees in the Middle East under circumstances that were increasingly difficult as a result of Israeli measures of collective punishment - destruction of homes and property, curfews and closures, incursions and bombardments, restrictions on freedom of movement, in addition to the construction of the separation wall. Those restrictions had seriously impaired UNRWA operations and occasionally caused serious incidents: UNRWA vehicles had been fired on and staff members

had been killed, injured, beaten or humiliated by Israeli soldiers. These obstructive, unlawful and inhuman measures pointed to a calculated effort to undermine UNRWA's role and activities. Bangladesh condemned such violations and reiterated its demand on Israel to ensure that UNRWA enjoyed unrestricted mobility in order to fulfil the responsibilities in its mandate.

18. Continued support of UNRWA was crucial to the survival of the Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. UNRWA's financial situation had deteriorated further with the deepening of the Middle-East crisis and adequate funding of its regular budget was required to ensure the maintenance of the Agency's infrastructure and the implementation of its main programmes. Bangladesh appealed to the international community - which had a moral responsibility to help the Palestinian people achieve their just aspirations to a normal and peaceful life - to raise contributions to the Agency. On the other hand, reform and revitalization were essential for UNRWA to adapt to the rapidly changing political environment in the region and the evolving needs of Palestinian refugees. The internal reform process would hopefully improve UNRWA's efficiency and strengthen its relations with donor countries. Bangladesh welcomed the fact that the Agency promoted income-generating activities through a self-sustaining market-oriented micro-credit programme. After their successful introduction in Gaza and West Bank, those facilities had been expanded in Lebanon and Syria and so far 15,740 loans with a total value of US\$12.34 million had been provided to refugees. The beneficiaries of 31 per cent of these loans were women entrepreneurs. Since its inception in 1991, the programme had disbursed 75,483 loans totalling US\$81.21 million. Bangladesh, birthplace of the concept of micro-credit, would be happy to share its experience in that area with UNRWA and its Palestinian brethren.

19. **Mr. Berry** (Canada) said that Canada recognized the important work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), without which refugee conditions would be far worse and more destabilizing for the region as a whole. The grave deterioration in conditions in the Gaza Strip underlined the urgent imperative to ensure effective protection for the refugees and the civilian population at large. Canada shared the concern of others about the violent deaths of children during

recent violence in the Gaza Strip, including in UNRWA schools, and called on all parties to pay special attention to the protection and safety of children. Canada was also deeply concerned that security restrictions imposed in light of these developments had been so rigorously applied to UNRWA staff that humanitarian relief personnel had been prevented from entering or leaving the Gaza Strip, which was inconsistent with the principles of international humanitarian law. In the preceding four years, UNRWA had done an extraordinary job under dangerous conditions. The safety of UNRWA staff remained a priority for Canada.

20. Canada's commitment to UNRWA and Palestinian refugees was steadfast. Canada ranked among the UNRWA's 10 largest donors and in 2004 had contributed CDN\$10 million in core funding to UNRWA, CDN\$1.6 million to the emergency appeal and CDN\$1 million in response to the destruction of property at Rafah. Canada welcomed UNRWA's commitment to implementing long-term internal reforms concerning various programming and management mechanisms and procedures in order to ensure the well-being of Palestinian refugees and greater accountability to the international community, particularly to the donors. Canada welcomed the creation of the Working Group on Stakeholder Relations, which would hopefully enhance the partnership between UNRWA and the host and donor countries. Canada was pleased that UNRWA has recently reiterated to its employees the importance of their work as impartial, non-political international civil servants. The international community should continue to respond generously to the humanitarian assistance appeals, but eventually the only way in which the peoples of the Middle East could have a future was the negotiation of a just and sustainable peace. In that connection, Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank would open new opportunities to apply the roadmap. In the meantime, UNRWA continued to be essential to assisting the refugees in the areas of education, health and social well-being.

21. **Mr. van den Berg** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey, and the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, and the European Free Trade

Association (EFTA) countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, thanked the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic for providing assistance to Palestinian refugees for more than five decades. The European Union, seriously concerned over the cycle of retaliatory violence in Israel and the occupied territories, condemned all forms of terrorism, including rocket attacks into Israel, and called upon the Palestinian Authority to take firm action against such terrorist acts. Though Israel had the right to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks, the exercise of that right must take place within the boundaries of international law. The European Union therefore condemned the disproportionate nature of Israeli military action - which had claimed the lives of many civilians, including children, and left many injured - in the Gaza strip.

22. The European Union took note of, and voiced concern over, the annual report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), describing a serious deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the West Bank and Gaza, particularly increasing malnutrition and destruction of shelters in refugee camps, conditions that most severely affected women and children. The situation of children in particular gave cause for concern. The Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority should respect children's rights and make every possible effort to protect children. The Israeli Government should show restraint, take no action that aggravated the humanitarian and economic plight of the Palestinian people and take without delay measures in accordance with the obligations of the roadmap. Limitations to the freedom of movement of UNRWA staff had forced it to suspend many of its normal operations, including food aid. The European Union urged once more the Government of Israel to allow full and secure access of diplomatic and humanitarian personnel, as required under international humanitarian law and the roadmap. In view of recent serious allegations against UNRWA, there was a risk that an unjustified impression could spread among Israeli security personnel that UNRWA was not an impartial aid agency. Such an impression would have negative repercussions for the safety of UNRWA staff. The European Union called on the Israeli authorities to avoid such prejudicial statements. In that connection, the European Union reiterated its full confidence in the

integrity and impartiality of Commissioner-General of UNRWA.

23. The European Union welcomed UNRWA's decision to increase efficiency in accordance with the commitments made at the Geneva conference. It also welcomed UNRWA's review of registration procedures and criteria applied with a view to enabling the registration of descendants of female refugees married to non-refugees. The European Union was aware of the wide financing gap that still existed in UNRWA's emergency programmes and therefore supported the Commissioner-General in his effort to enlarge the donor community, particularly among the Gulf Countries and other Arab and Islamic States. In that context, the European Union considered the forthcoming Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) meeting as a unique opportunity to assess Palestinian needs and solicit larger donor contributions. The European Union was the largest contributor to UNRWA. With contributions from the European Commission and Member States of over €200 million in 2003, the European Union contribution accounted for more than half of the UNRWA revenue. European Union policy was to increase its support to Palestinian refugees throughout the region.

24. In line with international law and Security Council resolution 1544 (2004), the European Union called on the Israeli Government to cease demolitions and take urgent action to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians. It also urged Israel to reverse its settlement policy and to freeze all settlement activity, dismantle outposts erected since March 2001 and end land confiscations and the construction of the so-called security fence on Palestinian land, all of which threatened to render the implementation of the two-State solution physically impossible. The European Union reaffirmed its readiness to continue providing assistance to the Palestinian Authority in its reform process and urged it to implement in full and without further delay the reform package agreed upon with the international community in the framework of the Task Force on Palestinian Reform. It reaffirmed its commitment to a negotiated two-State solution which would result in a viable, sovereign and independent Palestinian State existing side by side and in peace with an Israel living within recognized and secure borders. The European Union would not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties and

reaffirmed that the roadmap was the fundamental framework for a resolution of the conflict. The European Union hoped that positive developments would lead to a solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees. Until then, the services provided by UNRWA remained essential.

25. **Ms. Álvarez** (Cuba) underscored the abnegation of the staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the face of escalating violence in the occupied territories. Regrettably, the negotiation process was increasingly filled with hurdles and the Palestinian people faced an untenable situation, characterized by a great number of deaths, casualties and families destroyed by constant Israeli aggression and compounded by the financial losses resulting from internal and external closures, curfews and restrictions on the freedom of movement. Such measures also affected the UNRWA. Building the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territories had further aggravated the situation. The wall had been denounced by the great majority of Member States, because it violated the principles and basic standards of international law, the United Nations Charter and a number of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Destruction caused by increased Israeli military raids in the occupied territories also affected UNRWA facilities and infrastructure.

26. With maximum regret, Cuba considered that the attainment of a just unsustainable peace in the region continued to be a chimera. In view of that saddening situation, the praiseworthy work that UNRWA carried out since its inception acquired greater significance. Accordingly, UNRWA's budget problems, which undermined its capacity to meet the refugees' growing needs, gave cause for concern. The international community's response had fallen short of the 2003 appeals and could not meet UNRWA's most elementary needs. Cuba therefore supported UNRWA's request to raise contributions, especially from developed countries. Despite economic difficulties faced by Cuba, 351 young Palestinians had since 1961 studied on scholarships and grants in its educational institutions and received diplomas, including 298 university degrees, and 17 Palestinian students were currently attending Cuban universities. Lastly, Cuba reaffirmed its support for UNRWA's work and hoped that the Israeli Government would discontinue the policy of

imposing restrictions that made it difficult for the Agency to develop its activities.

27. **Ms. Liu Jia** (China) said that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had helped to improve the situation of the Palestinians, promote economic development and boost social stability in the region and come to symbolize the international community's commitment to assisting the refugees. The work carried out by its staff in a dangerous environment was laudable. China hoped that the international community would increase its contributions and fulfil as soon as possible the commitments made, since UNRWA constantly faced financial limitations that prevented it from providing its services normally. The current situation in the Middle East gave cause for concern. The implementation of the roadmap had been seriously sidetracked and the peace process had come to a standstill. China had encouraged negotiations between the parties and hoped that both would comply with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 334 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and with the principle of land for peace. It also hoped that the commitments made in accordance with the roadmap would be respected, the spiral of violence would cease and all possible steps would be taken with a view to attaining peaceful coexistence in the region. The Chinese Government was ready to spare no efforts for that dream to become a reality.

28. **Mr. Ghafari** (United States of America) said that the United States, through its substantial financial contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), had demonstrated its enduring support for humanitarian relief efforts for Palestinian refugees. In the previous fiscal year, the United States had committed more than US\$127 million to UNRWA, including US\$40 million toward the 2004 emergency appeal. The United States continued to be the largest single contributor to both the regular budget and the emergency appeals of UNRWA. The United States Government continued to support UNRWA's assistance mandate as a force for stability in the region and encouraged other countries to increase their contributions. The United States had not supported some of the resolutions that had traditionally been introduced under that agenda item because it believed that they went beyond purely humanitarian concerns. For that reason, his delegation had introduced

resolution 58/95. Consolidating resolutions under the agenda item discussed should be a goal for those who sought revitalization of the General Assembly and more focused international attention on the financial requirements of UNRWA and the assistance needs of Palestinian refugees. The priority was to renew the UNRWA mandate for three years. For that reason, the Committee should adopt the corresponding resolution and defer consideration of other resolutions on UNRWA.

29. **Mr. Kanafi** (Israel) stated that Israel made a good faith effort to facilitate the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) despite an intensely difficult situation on the ground caused by Palestinian terrorists, such as the 16-year old refugee and suicide bomber who had recently blown up a Tel Aviv market, killing three Israeli shoppers. The situation was difficult for all: Israel, charged with protecting the lives of its citizens; UNRWA, charged with providing humanitarian assistance to Palestinians; and the refugees themselves, struggling to lead normal lives while terrorist organizations exploited their weaknesses in pursuit of their own murderous aims. It was in the common interest that UNRWA should maintain neutrality and impartiality in statements made by its leadership and in its press releases. It should promote its vital humanitarian mission without politicizing and grandstanding. Israel was interested, however, in further developing important operational and diplomatic ties and dialogue with UNRWA. Every day, at the Erez and Karni crossings into and out of the Gaza Strip, arrangements were made to enable the passage of UNRWA vehicles, goods and personnel, and in that exercise Israel took real risks because terrorists attempted to turn those crossing points into war zones.

30. At the diplomatic level, Israel had supported resolution 58/95. It had not been easy to do so, as the resolution had contained many elements which had been unpalatable to the delegation of Israel. Only the cynicism of the PLO observer and a handful of like-minded States had prevented that historic resolution from being adopted by consensus. Debate on Palestinian refugees was tainted by hypocrisy, as the high rhetoric of the representatives of Arab States, their professed sympathy with the suffering refugees and the insular unwillingness of their countries to do anything to alleviate their suffering had shown. Switzerland, for instance, donated to UNRWA annually approximately

ten times the combined contribution of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. Blame for the economic plight of the refugees rested with the terrorists, who had turned their homes and communities into war zones, endangering Palestinians, UNRWA staff and Israelis alike. Israel's measures of self-defence could seem to provide Arab countries with a comfortable excuse, but actually the Palestinian refugees had been abandoned by most of the Arab world.

31. Israel had been waging a bitter war on terrorism since October of 2000. Since then, over 1,000 Israelis had been killed and 6,000 injured as a direct result of Palestinian terror attacks. In their attacks, terror groups had demonstrated that they had no respect for international humanitarian rules in their murderous activities, abused internationally protected emblems such as those of the United Nations and the Red Crescent, misused United Nations vehicles and ambulances for the transport of terrorists and weapons, taken refuge in United Nations facilities and some - even UNRWA employees - had used their status and United Nations travel documents to pursue their destructive and murderous aims. Security Council resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1566 (2004) specifically obligated States to combat terrorism everywhere and UNRWA had recognized that right and obligation in paragraph 4 of the Commissioner-General's report. Although the 1967 Comay-Micheltmore Exchange of Letters, which had been often cited in the debates, stipulated that the Israeli Government should facilitate UNRWA's task to the best of its ability, it also made that provision subject to regulations or arrangements which might be necessary for military security. Accordingly, limitations on the movement of goods and individuals were at times necessary for security reasons and UNRWA had agreed to that.

32. UNRWA had not yet done enough to meet the security challenges. In its report of 17 November 2003, the General Accounting Office of the United States Congress had made a number of disturbing observations: UNRWA took no vetting action as to terrorist backgrounds of potential employees or beneficiaries and relied on Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon to verify applicant statements on past criminal actions. The United States State Department had asked UNRWA to adopt a more formal system to ensure that its facilities, employees and beneficiaries, to the extent possible, remained free of association with terrorism.

Some UNRWA leaders had shown indifference to the employment of Hamas activists by the Agency or the use of UNRWA facilities by Hamas, recognized as a terrorist organization by the European Union, the United States, Canada and Japan, which provided most of UNRWA's financing. Nor did UNRWA take measures after the election of 23 representatives of Hamas's "Islamic Bloc" to UNRWA teachers' trade union. Hamas could not be seen as a legitimate social or political organization and membership in it was incompatible with the standards of conduct for the international civil service. In recent years, eight UNRWA employees had been convicted and nine more were currently under indictment for terrorism-related crimes. The Spokesman for the Secretary-General had voiced concern over the issue and urged the Government of Israel to share with the United Nations any information it might have so that the matter could be properly investigated. It was necessary that such issues as the use of United Nations vehicles, ambulances and medical facilities and emblems by terrorists and armed elements or the presence of such vehicles and emblems in inappropriate contexts and situations should be approached with diligence and true concern for humanitarian, not political, questions in order to overcome disagreements of the past and begin a new chapter of close cooperation.

33. A number of speakers had stated that they found it difficult to separate the humanitarian needs of a suffering population from political considerations. Those were the same delegations that, along with some UNRWA officials, pointed an accusing finger at Israeli forces, but conveniently ignored Qassam rockets fired at Israeli cities and the fact that radical terrorists had used UNRWA schools and facilities as cover for attacks against Israel and refugee camps as a base for sending teenage suicide bombers. The refugees' suffering could have ended 56 years earlier, had the Arab States truly been interested in a solution. It could end immediately, if the Palestinian side fulfilled its roadmap obligations and undertook a political reform to fight terrorism as required by the international community. Instead, the refugees needed the humanitarian assistance provided by UNRWA and other United Nations agencies. It was up to the Fourth Committee and the Secretariat to ensure the impartiality of those bodies and allow UNRWA to fulfil its agenda in a manner that met the real needs of the refugees and promoted the interests of the donor community. Israel remained committed to

dialogue and hoped that in the foreseeable future humanitarian aid would no longer be necessary.

34. **Ms. Mapara** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the IFRC was particularly pleased with the support provided by the international community to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) at the Geneva conference and the fact that various Governments had pledged to increase resources allocated to UNRWA's programmes. The President of the Palestine Red Crescent (PRC) had been a leading member of the IFRC's delegation to the conference, in which members of the PRC youth programme had also been actively involved. PRC had a network of 20 branches throughout the West Bank and Gaza, ran programmes in close collaboration with UNRWA and other bodies of the United Nations family located in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. For instance, one programme that PRC operated in close cooperation with UNRWA were its hospitals: it operated six out of the 15 hospitals providing secondary health care to refugees in Lebanon, was responsible for such other services as emergency medical assistance, disaster risk reduction and mental health and social services and supported humanitarian values and principles. It carried out those activities through 50 volunteer committees, comprising more than 5,700 volunteers, which provided assistance to almost 35,000 of the most vulnerable refugees. Youth was a priority, with over 50 summer camps accommodating over 6,000 participants.

35. It was necessary to highlight the importance of strengthening the support of international donors to the IFRC, which hoped that the Geneva conference would draw renewed international attention to the serious problems faced by refugees. That should raise awareness of the work done by UNRWA and other agencies dedicated to meeting the needs of Palestinian refugees. The IFRC looked forward to the maintenance of the "new humanitarian mobilization", expressed at the conference and intended to enhance its operational and policy relationships with UNRWA. The IFRC was constantly working with the interests and concerns of the PRC and the Palestinian people at the forefront. The international community and UNRWA would hopefully continue to support the PRC and other organizations committed to building resilient communities and a future based on dignity, peace and prosperity.

36. **Mr. Hansen** (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), in his concluding remarks, expressed gratitude on behalf of his 25,000 colleagues for the overwhelming and encouraging support stated by delegations and hoped that their statements would translate into tangible support on the ground. UNRWA would continue to work to improve conditions in all areas in which it operated, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories, and follow up on the Geneva Conference.

37. Regarding Israel's statement, he said that the representative of Israel had often participated in a dialogue with UNRWA and that he hoped that the cooperation would continue without "grandstanding and politicizing". Since in the UNRWA teachers' trade union elections no candidate had run on behalf of any bloc, it was inaccurate to allege that any representative of Hamas's "Islamic Bloc" had been elected. Concerning staff members accused or condemned since 2001, UNRWA had been provided with partial documentation with respect to the conviction of five staff members only in August 2004 and with respect to a sixth person on 19 October 2004. UNRWA was waiting for the official translation of those documents, which had been submitted in Hebrew, not an official language of the United Nations. Additional written evidence, including witness statements, for the six cases had been requested, and UNRWA was still awaiting a response from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Once evidence was provided and UNRWA could interview the detainees, the Agency would take appropriate action, but it was impossible to take action on detentions that had been held secret. UNRWA had received information that one staff member, who had been under detention for one year and a half, had signed a confession in Hebrew, a language that he did not understand. Due process had to be followed in all cases. Out of 12,000 staff members in the territories, only a few had been indicted or convicted over a period of four years.

38. The Commissioner-General welcomed the Israeli statement, which had been a great deal more conciliatory and productive and had pointed to a resumption of dialogue between UNRWA and the representative's Government. Without such dialogue, UNRWA would not be able to carry out its humanitarian task. In that case, the Government of Israel would not be able to cope with the massive

humanitarian problems, for which the occupying Power was responsible, to attain what ought to be the objective of all present: improving the conditions in which unfortunately lived the refugees in the occupied territories and alleviating the suffering of so many innocent civilians.

39. **Ms. Nasser** (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that Israel had again turned a humanitarian and political issue into an issue solely about terror, ignoring the actual conditions described in the Commissioner-General's report and the fact that the context of the current crisis was simply the continued occupation of the Palestinian territories. Israel's legal obligations as occupying power under international law were clear and constituted the central issue. Had it not been for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Israel would have been completely responsible for the well-being of the civilian Palestinian population under occupation, which Israel constantly aggressed, violating all principles of international law. The concern expressed by Israel for the plight of the refugees was the height of hypocrisy. Their situation was caused by the policies of Israel, which denied them their right to return to their homes pursuant to General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948. Israel alone was responsible for the poverty, destitution and suffering of 4.2 million refugees. They and the refugee camps existed because Israel had refused to solve the problem in accordance with international humanitarian law. Israel's representative had had the audacity to speak of respect for those principles and the United Nations emblems, while Israel spurned international standards on a daily basis and committed war crimes against the refugees, who should have since long ago received international protection under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Instead, Israel had continued to terrorize, humiliate and punish them, causing them indescribable suffering. As long as a just and lasting solution, based on the United Nations resolutions and international law, to the problem of Palestinian refugees was not found, there could be no peace in the Middle East.

The meeting rose at 5.00 p.m.