



Bangladesh

Statement under the Agenda Item 53: United Nations Relief Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the Fourth Committee of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly

Statement by: Mr. Tareq Md. Ariful Islam, Deputy Permanent Representative

Date and venue: Friday, 3 November 2017 at Conference Room 4

Mr. Chairman,

Bangladesh aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

My delegation reiterates its appreciation for the invaluable work done by United Nations Relief Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) under difficult circumstances. We thank the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for presenting his comprehensive annual report and his briefing to this Committee on the challenges faced by the Agency during the reporting period.

We thank UNRWA for its relentless efforts to provide sustainable, efficient and quality services to the Palestine refugees. We underscore the importance of further strengthening the Agency's capacity to fulfill its humanitarian and human development mandates by providing, under enabling circumstances, protection and essential services to the Palestine refugees. In this connection, we recall the framework set out in UNRWA's Medium-term Strategy for 2016-2021, outlining its strategic outcomes addressing the rights and protection, health, education, livelihoods and basic human needs of the Palestinian refugees.

We remain seriously concerned over the safety and security of the UNRWA staff. So far, 30 UNRWA staffs were killed and 26 are missing. There can be no justification for killing and abduction of UN personnel serving on the ground. There can also be no excuse for the wanton destruction of emergency shelters, homes, schools and civilian infrastructure supporting innocent civilian, including refugees among different vulnerable groups. Bangladesh underscores the need for according the highest priority to the protection and safety of UN personnel serving in UNRWA and other volatile and complex situations, and urges the Security Council to continue remain seized with this critical concern.

We note from the Commissioner-General's report about the difficulties being created by the Occupying Power for UNRWA staff to discharge their services, mostly in the name of tightened security procedures and restrictions. It is of further concern that the immunities and privileges that UNRWA and its staff are entitled to are often being disregarded.

Mr. Chairman,

UNRWA provides humanitarian assistance to nearly 5.4 million Palestinian refugees, and thus needs sufficient resources to respond to the growing need for humanitarian and emergency services. The working group on the financing of UNRWA has reported about the recurrent shortfall in UNRWA's regular programme budget, and it is particularly worrisome that this year the shortfall has gone up to \$126 million which amounts to two-months' expenditure even with a zero-growth budget. The situation is so dire that the Agency had to take a loan of US\$20 million for the first time in its history. We urge international donors to continue supporting the cause of the Palestinian refugees through provision of increased, predictable and sustainable resources for UNRWA and its operations. In this vein, we would like to thank the Advisory Commission for UNRWA led by Switzerland delegation for its consultation with wider membership at the UN in early 2017 on how to address this budget shortfall, and the Advisory Commission subsequently submitted its report to the Secretary General.

Bangladesh will continue to do its part in maintaining advocacy for the Palestinian refugees in line with our unstinting commitment to the international protection regime. In the backdrop of unceasing influx of hundreds and thousands of forcibly displaced, dispossessed and persecuted Rohingya from Myanmar's Rakhine State into Bangladesh, we reaffirm our solidarity with the protracted plight of the Palestinian refugees around the world and our continued support for the few Palestinian citizens based in Bangladesh.

Mr. Chairman,

UNRWA was established in 1949 as a subsidiary body of the UN with the aim to ensure the human rights to the fullest extent possible for some seven hundred and fifty thousand Palestine refugees, which is now 5.4 million, and is estimated to be 6.4 million by 2020. Even after 67 years of the creation of this Agency, the hope for a peaceful, just and viable political solution to this central crisis in the Middle East still remains elusive.

The international community must seriously address this longstanding crisis and deliver on its commitment to 'leave no one behind' by giving due attention to the rights and needs of the Palestinian refugees.

I thank you.