

UN agency for Palestinian refugees faces funding crisis

Author:

AP

ID:

1638303205039450200

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AMMAN: The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said Tuesday it was unable to pay its 28,000 employees on time this month because of a major funding crisis, warning of potential cuts in vital services to millions of people amid a global pandemic.

UNRWA runs schools, clinics and food distribution programs for millions of registered Palestinian refugees across the Middle East, mainly the descendants of Palestinians who fled or were driven out of what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding its creation.

The 5.7 million refugees mostly live in camps that have been transformed into built-up but often impoverished residential areas in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza, as well as Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini told reporters in Jordan that the resumption of US support for the agency this year – which had been halted by the Trump administration – was offset by a reduction in funding by other donors.

The agency also went through a management crisis in 2019, when its previous head resigned amid allegations of sexual misconduct, nepotism and other abuses of authority at the agency.

Staff went on strike Monday after being informed last week that salaries would be delayed, but halted the action following mediation, Lazzarini said. “If UNRWA health services are compromised in the middle of a global pandemic, COVID-19 vaccination rollout will come to an end. Maternal and childcare will stop, half a million girls and boys not knowing if they can continue learning, and over two million of the poorest Palestinian refugees will not get cash and food assistance,” he said.

“The humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees keep increasing while funding to the agency has stagnated since 2013.”

Lazzarini said the agency raised enough donations at a recent conference in Brussels to cover up to 48 percent of its budget in 2022 and 2023. It also generated \$60 million toward a \$100 million shortfall until the end of the year to keep services running.

“I’m still not yet in a position to say when the November salaries will be paid,” he said.

Critics of UNRWA, including Israel, accuse it of perpetuating the 73-year refugee crisis and say host nations should shoulder the burden of absorbing them.

The Palestinians say the refugees and their descendants have a “right of return” to their homes in what is now Israel, a position supported by host countries. Israel rejects that, noting that if such a right were fully implemented it would leave the country with a Palestinian majority.



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Human rights commission calls for end to Israeli occupation of Palestine
UK funding cuts push UN Palestine aid agency 'close to collapse'

[Give Lebanon a break, politicians told](#)

Author:

Najia Houssari

ID:

1638302971729437500

Tue, 2021-11-30 23:10

BEIRUT: The President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Charles Arbid launched a campaign entitled "Give Lebanon a Break" on Tuesday to stop political clashes during the month of December.

In a press conference attended by Nayla Tueni, CEO of An-Nahar media group, and prominent figures from the worlds of economics, commerce and tourism, Arbid said: "The Lebanese today are facing a dead end. The political parties are not negotiating with each other, which is an expression of how bad the situation is."

He said that politics was not the art of incitement, accusations of treason, or mobilizing one street against another. "Politics is meant to serve the

people.”

“ECOSOC is the natural place to express the mood of the people,” he said. “Lebanon has really become the republic of perpetual crises and political clashes due to ill practices, and our ambition is to transform it into the republic of solutions.”

The press conference was prompted by the governmental paralysis that has prevailed since last October.

“How can we invite expatriates to come and spend the holiday season in this country with their families while political clashes continue?” he asked. “How can we negotiate with the International Monetary Fund while political clashes continue? How can we confront the new strain of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and cooperate to reduce the price of medicines and hospitalization bills while the political clashes continue? How can we reboot the economy, increase wages, combat poverty, curb unemployment and emigration, while the political clashes continue?”

Arbid called for a pause to political clashes during December, so that the Lebanese have chance to catch their breath and political parties can calm down and start searching for solutions away from confrontations.

Arbid addressed the politicians, saying: “Give us just one month.”

Tueni said: “We cannot ask anyone about their situation because we already know the answer which is not positive. We fear sending our children to school or going to work. We live in uncertainty.”

“This is not the image of Lebanon that we like, the image of loving life and smiling. Let us stick together as Lebanese, so that this month can pass without clashes in the streets, burning tires, nor confessional or sectarian tension. Give Lebanon the break it needs to continue.”

Tueni said: “We, the media, will shed light on all positive news, and we might cover a clash or a speech but in a new way. We will shed the light on any violator.”

Pierre Ashkar, the head of the Federation of Tourist Syndicates and the head of the Syndicate of Hotel Owners in Lebanon, said that the tourism sector is facing a great depression. “Everybody is working against tourism in Lebanon, which is confirmed by the declarations by politicians and the hostility they showed to the Arabs.”

He said: “The sector has been left prey to wolves after a relatively good period during the summer when internal tourism was active. Yet the current situation exhibited a huge decline and 2,000 rooms have been vacant in Beirut hotels since the explosion of Aug. 4.”

“Until now no tourism enterprise declared its program for the holiday season, for there is nothing encouraging as the dollar exchange rate is still increasing, there is no electricity, water, nor diesel, and the costs have become huge for the owners of enterprises, with no political nor economic solution in horizon. So, there are no indications that we will be celebrating this year.”

Ashkar said: “There are 650,000 people who used to travel to Turkey every year but who substituted this with internal tourism due to the high travel costs and health risks.”

While there are no indicators of a possible political silence during holiday season, activists on social media have launched a campaign “#Khallouh Indcom” (Keep him with you), calling on Qatar to keep President Michel Aoun, who was visiting Doha, and not let him back to Lebanon.

Some of them called for “stopping all flights between Lebanon and Qatar,” while an activist tweeted that he is ready to pay for the President’s expenses, and another tweeted “Thank You Qatar.”



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Geagea says delaying vote would condemn Lebanon to ‘slow death’ Lebanon judiciary stands firm despite Hezbollah allegations

[Arab coalition carries out airstrike on Sanaa targets](#)

Author:

Arab News

ID:

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Tue, 2021-11-30 02:55

RIYADH: The Arab coalition carried out airstrikes on locations in Yemen’s capital, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

The coalition asked civilians in Sanaa not to gather near the targeted sites.

The operation complies with international humanitarian law and its customary rules, the coalition said.

The coalition has hit a number of sites in the capital in the past few weeks in an effort to deteriorate the capabilities of the Iran-backed Houthi militia.

Previous attacks have targeted drone warehouses and experts belong to Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guard.

The Houthis repeatedly target the Kingdom with bomb-laden drones, mostly without much success.

Houthi attempts to target civilians has been labeled as war crimes by the Kingdom.



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[Those guilty of chemical attacks must be held accountable, says UN Chief](#)

Tue, 2021-11-30 00:54

NEW YORK: The perpetrators of chemical-weapon attacks must be identified and held accountable for their actions, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday.

His comments came as he opened the second session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Currently, 60 percent of UN member states are covered by five nuclear weapon-free zones in Latin America and the Caribbean; the South Pacific; Southeast Asia; Africa; and Central Asia. Guterres said that expanding these zones would lead to more robust disarmament and non-proliferation norms.

“That is particularly the case in the Middle East, where concerns over nuclear programs persist, and where conflicts and civil wars are causing widespread civilian casualties and suffering, undermining stability and disrupting social and economic development,” the UN chief said as he again called on all in the region to exercise restraint and avoid the escalation of conflicts.

The second session of the annual conference, which was delayed by a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, was presided over by Mansour Al-Otaibi, the permanent representative to the UN for Kuwait, which was chosen to inherit the presidency from Jordan after the first session in 2019.

In line with a General Assembly decision, the goal of the conference is to “elaborate a legally binding treaty” to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, on the basis of “arrangements freely arrived at by the states of the region.”

Guterres praised Kuwait for “actively engaging participants during the intersessional period to learn from the other nuclear weapon-free zones and continue moving the process forward.”

He said the conference represents a chance to produce tangible results for the Middle East and to reinstate dialogue on the “full and effective” implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the Iran nuclear deal.

He urged “all parties” to work to salvage the agreement, signed in 2015 by world powers and Iran, under which Tehran pledged to halt its efforts to develop a nuclear weapon in return for the lifting of international sanctions.

Former President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the deal in 2018. A sixth round of negotiations to revive the JCPOA began on Monday in Vienna.

“Your strong political will, together with the international community’s support, can transform the vision of a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction into a reality,” Guterres told the participants.



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[Lebanese protesters block roads over economic meltdown](#)

Tue, 2021-11-30 00:09

BEIRUT: Demonstrators blocked roads across parts of Lebanon on Monday in protest at the country's economic meltdown, days after its currency sank to new lows.

There has been little progress since Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government was appointed in September after more than a year of political deadlock.

Roads were blocked by piles of burning tires in central Beirut, Tripoli in

northern Lebanon and the southern city of Sidon.

Schools were forced to close in Beirut after the protests made them inaccessible to students. Protesters in the city's southern suburbs, meanwhile, blocked the road to the airport in front of Al-Aytam station.

Less than 24 hours before the Beirut protests, residents of Ali Al-Nahri, in the Bekaa Valley, launched their own protests, shouting "we are cold and hungry."

A spokesperson for the protesters said: "We will take to the streets more frequently in the coming days unless the governing authority put a stop to the deteriorating living conditions the Lebanese are facing."

He added: "The people of Beirut are noble. They are fighting extremely hard for their city and their livelihood."

"They are not thieves, and today's move does not have any political, electoral, parliamentary or ministerial dimension. Its sole purpose is the livelihood of citizens after a large number of students now go to school without any food."

In a UNICEF report published last week, the agency said: "More than 30 percent of families have at least one child in Lebanon who skipped a meal, while 77 percent of families say they lack sufficient food and 60 percent of them buy food by accumulating unpaid bills or borrowing money."

The protests coincided with President Michel Aoun's visit to Qatar to attend the opening of the FIFA Arab Cup and inaugurate the new Olympic Stadium.

The president discussed Lebanon's economic meltdown and unprecedented diplomatic crisis with Gulf states during his talks with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani.

Al-Thani reiterated Qatar's readiness to help in all areas needed for the rise of Lebanon from the "difficult circumstances it is going through."

He announced that Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani will visit Beirut in the coming period, to follow up on the developments and provide the country with necessary assistance.

He hoped for "a resolution for the crisis between Lebanon and a number of Gulf states in the near future, especially as Lebanon has always stood by all the Arab and Gulf states."

Aoun welcomed any "investment from Qatar to implement developmental projects in Lebanon in the area of energy, electricity and banking, where there are many opportunities."

Qatar will continue to stand by the Lebanese people and to do anything in its power to alleviate their suffering, said the president.

"There was a consensus that this phase needs the brotherly Arab states,

especially the Gulf states, to stand by Lebanon,” said Aoun.

He pointed out that the Lebanese-Gulf relations “always were, and must remain, based on mutual fraternity.”

Aoun stressed the need to overcome any defects in these ties, notably because Lebanon desires to the best relations with brotherly states.

“My presence in Doha today only confirms our commitment to those relations and our genuine desire to cooperate on keeping them serene and restoring them to a normal state, thus serving Lebanon and the brotherly Gulf states,” he said.

Aoun’s remarks came as Maronite Patriarch Mar Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi took a firm position against “attempts to change Lebanon in order to impose a new governing formula by force or persuasion.”

In a televised speech broadcast on Monday, Al-Rahi touched on the secretary-general of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, reprimanding judicial authorities, asking: “Is he above the judicial authority?”

Al-Rahi said the country “is highly influenced by Hezbollah.”

He asked: “In contrast, where is the state and where is the president of the republic? Why are they submissive if someone is intimidating us?”

He noted that “the one disrupting the government is practically disrupting the life of the homeland and causing the hunger of citizens.”



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