

Donors come to UN agency's aid with extra \$118 million to help Palestine refugees

International donors on Thursday pledged an additional \$118 million for the United Nations agency assisting Palestine refugees to help overcome what its chief called its "greatest and gravest financial crisis ever."

Established by the General Assembly in 1949, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides assistance and protection to over five million registered Palestine refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

This year, the Agency faced an acute funding shortage after the United States, which has traditionally been its single largest contributor, decided to reduce its contribution by \$300 million.

"The announcement of an additional \$118 million is a very significant step in the direction of overcoming UNRWA's greatest and gravest financial crisis ever," its Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl, told reporters at UN Headquarters following a ministerial meeting to discuss the Agency's funding gap.

He said the level of participation in Thursday's meeting, held on the margins of the General Assembly's annual high-level session, and the collective mobilization that was displaced to help UNRWA overcome its financial crisis, sent a message to Palestine refugees that they are not forgotten.

We're sending a message that the world does still care about the plight of Palestinian refugees – UNRWA chief Pierre Krähenbühl

Despite various efforts in recent months, including \$260 million in new funding, UNRWA came into today's meeting facing a remaining shortfall of \$186 million. With the pledges announced today, it still has a deficit of \$68 million.

"We've dealt with part of the challenge today, which is trying to move closer to addressing the budget deficit that exists," said Ayman H. Safadi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, which co-hosted today's meeting along with Turkey, Sweden, Japan, Germany and the European Union.

"I think the challenge is to sustain this effort and I think part of what we discussed today is a way in which we could have a long-term financial planning so [...] every year in August Palestinian kids will [not] be wondering whether they'll have a school to go to or not."

[At UN Assembly, Israel's Netanyahu claims Iran harboring secret nuclear site](#)

Displaying photographs from the podium of the United Nations General Assembly, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday accused Iran of maintaining a secret atomic warehouse in Tehran, proving its intent to develop nuclear weapons despite the accord it reached with major powers in 2015.

"Today, I'm disclosing for the first time that Iran has another secret facility in Tehran, a secret atomic warehouse for storing massive amounts of equipment and material for Iran's secret nuclear weapons programme," he told world leaders on the third day of the Assembly's annual debate.

The site, he said, is three miles from where Israel reported seizing over 100,000 nuclear-related documents and videos stashed in vaults in an "innocent-looking building" in February, and he called on UN International Atomic Energy Agency ([IAEA](#)) chief Yukiya Amano to "do the right thing – go inspect this atomic warehouse immediately before the Iranians finish clearing it out."

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – reached by Iran, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the US and the European Union – sets out rigorous mechanisms for monitoring restrictions placed on Iran's nuclear programme, while paving the way for the lifting of UN sanctions against Iran.

Mr. Netanyahu, who from the start has opposed the accord, said Iranian officials were now "scurrying back and forth" trying to clean up the site, removing 15 kilogrammes of radioactive material last month.

"Now the Iranian officials cleaning out that site still have a lot of work to do because they've had at least 15 ship containers – they're gigantic – 15 ship containers full of nuclear-related equipment and material stored there," he said.

"Now, since each of those containers can hold 20 tons of material this means that this site contained as much as 300 tons of nuclear-related equipment and material," he added, praising United States President Donald Trump for renouncing the accord, warning the Europeans against appeasement, and calling for stiff new sanctions, such as the US will impose in November.

"So, here's what I say to Europe's leaders and to others: Instead of cuddling Iran's dictators, join the US and Israel and most of the Arab world in

supporting new sanctions against a regime that endangers all of us in all of the world,” said Prime Minister Netanyahu.

“I also have a message today for the tyrants of Tehran. Israel knows what you’re doing, and Israel knows where you’re doing it. Israel will never let a regime that calls for our destruction to develop nuclear weapons. Not now, not in 10 years, not ever,” he stressed, accusing Iran of using the money obtained from the lifting of sanctions to spread death and destruction throughout the region.

But, Mr. Netanyahu said, the Iran deal has had at least one unintended, positive consequence. “By empowering Iran, it brought Israel and many Arab states closer together than ever before in an intimacy and friendship that I have not seen in my lifetime and would have been unimaginable a few years ago,” he declared.

[*A summary of the statement can be found here.*](#)

New Zealand Prime Minister calls any breakdown of multilateralism ‘catastrophic’

The collapse of multilateralism would be “catastrophic,” Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, said on Thursday in her first speech at the United Nations General Assembly.

Opening her address with a Māori salutation, Ms. Ardern highlighted how the crumbling of multilateralism would negatively impact her country and others in the Pacific, especially on climate change.

“Any disintegration of multilateralism – any undermining of climate related targets and agreements – aren’t interesting footnotes in geopolitical history. They are catastrophic,” she warned.

Given the challenges of today, with their global nature and impact, “the need for collective action and multilateralism has never been clearer,” stressed the Prime Minister.

And yet, global debates and dialogues are not on the relevance and importance of international institutions but instead, “we find ourselves having to defend their very existence,” which begs the question: “How did we get here, and how do we get out?”

Prime Minister Ardern recounted that when Pacific Island leaders gathered at

the Pacific Islands Forum two weeks ago, they declared climate change as “the single biggest threat” to the security of their region.

“The impacts of climate change are not academic, or even arguable,” she underscored. “They are watching the sea levels rise, the extreme weather events increase, and the impact on their water supply and food crops.”

She called it “a grinding reality” to hear someone talk about where the sea was when they were a child, and potential loss of their entire village as an adult.

Noting that action in the wake of this global challenge remains optional, she stated: “But the impact of inaction does not.”

She detailed New Zealand’s efforts to combat this phenomenon, such as curbing offshore oil and gas exploration permits; setting a goal 100 per cent renewable energy goal by 2035; establishing a green infrastructure fund for innovation; and planting one billion trees over the next 10 years.

“These plans are unashamedly ambitious,” she maintained, adding “The threat climate change poses demands it.”

Explaining that her country only represents less than 0.2 percent of global emissions, she said: “That’s why, as a global community, not since the inception of the United Nations has there been a greater example of the importance of collective action and multilateralism, than climate change.”

“It should be a rallying cry to all of us,” she asserted, urging the world leaders to “rebuild and recommit to multilateralism” because international action works “in all of our best interest.”

“In the face of isolationism, protectionism, racism – the simple concept of looking outwardly and beyond ourselves, of kindness and collectivism, might just be as good a starting point as any,” she said. “So, let’s start here with the institutions that have served us well in times of need, and will do so again.”

[Full statement available here.](#)

Human rights ‘success stories’ shared at the UN to serve as example, and inspire others

The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) is 70 this year and since then, it’s helped improve the rights of vulnerable women, children and men

worldwide. The “Good Human Rights Stories” initiative was launched by 14 countries and the European Union to highlight the strengthening of rights, and inspire nations worldwide to follow suit.

At a high-level event held in that spirit on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, in New York, on Thursday, UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), drove home that point: “We should never forget the profound progress that has been made over the decades – and, indeed, that is happening as we speak.”

“Progress in one corner of the world plants a seed of hope in another,” he stated, referencing his own personal story. “I grew up under the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal and did not know democracy until I was twenty-four years old...But it was the human rights struggles and stories of others around the world that inspired and moved us to believe in change at home.”

[Michelle Bachelet](#), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who also delivered opening remarks cited recent human rights advancements across the world including in India, the Horn of Africa, South Africa, Georgia, Liberia, Tunisia and Chile.

“In many countries, things are moving in the right direction, sometimes not quickly enough, sometimes it’s not perfect, but nevertheless, they are moving and the broader impact is clear,” she said.

The event went on to showcase several initiatives and progress made to strengthen human rights in various countries, including the promotion of diversity in Indonesia, the role played by civil society in Korea, new legislation for gender equality in Tunisia, and prison reform in Georgia, to name a few.

On Wednesday, the UN held another high-level event marking the 70th anniversary of the UDHR, to highlight how making the text a reality, can be [a powerful tool](#) for nations across the world to prevent conflict and poverty.

[President of former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia denounces move to change country’s name](#)

Reminding the General Assembly on Thursday that Macedonia had been a co-founder of the United Nations, Gjorge Ivanov, President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, strongly rejected a referendum on changing the name of his country, calling it “a flagrant violation” of sovereignty.

“The aim is to limit the use of the name ‘Macedonian’ to the smallest possible space – and that is the space between our two ears, all while keeping our mouths closed,” said President Ivanov, adding: “It is a flagrant violation of the right to self-determination.”

Negotiations on [the name dispute](#) between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia began in 1993, and have taken place under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, led since 1999 by his Personal Envoy, Matthew Nimetz.

In the assembly today, President Ivanov said: “As I am speaking here, in my country, the Republic of Macedonia, they are counting the last hours before the referendum on which my fellow citizens have been asked to express themselves on the Prespa Agreement,” which would reportedly change the name of his country.

He denounced that Agreement, reached this past June, as a detrimental compromise, and likened it to “a bitter fruit of a tree that has been poisoned a long time ago”.

Emphasizing that the right of self-determination means that only the nation itself has the right to determine its destiny, based on autonomy, he stated it is “the right of people to choose their own name and the name of the State they created.”

“Only by respecting the right to self-determination will the United Nations be relevant for all peoples,” he underscored. “Still, with the Prespa Agreement, Greece is imposing a new name and is asking for an *erga omnes* implementation.”

He railed against giving Greece a “permanent monitoring” role over his country, from its name to its institutions, from censoring children’s schoolbooks to preventing citizens from expressing their Macedonian identity.

Urging his compatriots to refrain from Sunday’s vote, he indicated that if the referendum succeeds, “we will be a State only by name, but not in substance, because others will regulate our way of life.”

“However, if the referendum fails, a new possibility will arise,” he said, one to discuss and explore new options for resolving the issue “by respecting our fundamental right to self-determination”

[Full statement available here.](#)