

# 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."