

Easing funding woes for UN agency assisting Palestine refugees a 'wise investment for today and the future'

A pledging conference on Monday for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](#)) aimed to address the body's chronic funding shortfall and also examine long-term priorities.

"The [outstanding work](#) of UNRWA has an immediate effect by meeting the urgent humanitarian needs of millions of Palestine refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria," [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said in his opening remarks at the Conference.

"At the same time, this work provides a foundation of hope and dignity – serving as a critical conflict prevention mechanism in a turbulent region and moving our world closer to the promise of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) to leave no one behind," he added.

For decades, UNRWA's high quality education has been standard setting in the region, gender parity has been the school norm for generations and UNRWA health care has attained near universal immunization, the UN chief explained.

He also lauded the UN agency's microfinance programmes and its work providing food assistance to 1.7 million refugees, while acknowledging: "All these efforts have taken place in an environment of chronic economic hardship and conflict."

Mr. Guterres expressed deep gratitude to all who have contributed the funding that which has allowed UNRWA to maintain its vital services, noting the agency's own extraordinary measures to reduce its expenditures by an additional \$92 million.

"But these innovative efforts will not be sufficient to fully close the funding shortfall this year," he said, urging UN Member States to make up the difference.

UNRWA's vital efforts must be allowed to falter, he said, stressing that failure comes with a price, namely more hardship for communities; more desperation for the region; and more instability for the world.

"We must do everything possible to ensure that food continues to arrive, that schools remain open and that people do not lose hope," he said, and noted that closing UNRWA's funding gap "is a wise investment for today and for the future."

Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the UN General Assembly, pointed out that UNRWA had not been set up to last for 70 years.

“We have turned a temporary solution into the status quo,” he told those assembled, encouraging everyone to change that “through direct and meaningful talks.”

“And, ultimately,” he continued “a two-state solution, which allows Israelis and Palestinians to live side-by-side, in peace.”

He urged all to work together to come up with an immediate solution for the Agency’s shortfall, but added: “Let us not forget the bigger picture. And the urgent need for a political solution.”

For his part, UNRWA Commissioner General Pierre Krähenbühl presented a special report on the Agency’s current financial crisis, in which he outlined the dramatic dimensions of the funding shortfall.

He also highlighted resource mobilization efforts under way to address it, including the [Dignity Is Priceless](#) campaign, which aims to raise funds from individuals.

This year’s meeting was a milestone for judging the prospects to bridge UNRWA’s budget gap as well as a platform to outline consequences, should a significant shortfall remain.

The General Assembly established UNRWA in 1949 to provide assistance and protection to 5.3 million registered Palestine refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

[‘All atrocity crimes are preventable’ and can never be justified – UN chief](#)

Atrocity crimes – genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing – are not “inevitable”, the United Nations Secretary-General said on Monday, stressing that the international community must do more to end violence against innocent people.

Speaking at a General Assembly [debate](#) on the ‘responsibility to protect’ on Monday, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) highlighted that upholding the obligation, when it is most needed, is critical.

“At this time of extreme challenges, [we must not abandon the responsibility to protect](#) or leave it in a state of suspended animation, finely articulated in words but breached time and again in practice,” he said.

“Lofty principles mean little if they cannot be applied when they matter most.”

The [responsibility to protect](#), widely known as R2P, refers to the obligation of States toward their populations and toward all populations at risk of genocide and other mass war crimes.

After years of discussion in the wake of the atrocities committed in Bosnia and Rwanda during the 1990s, UN Member States committed to the principle by including R2P in the outcome document of the 2005 high-level [UN World Summit](#) in New York.

Lofty principles mean little if they cannot be applied when they matter most – *Secretary-General Guterres*

Today, Mr. Guterres reminded Member States of their duty to protect their own people and proposed steps they could take to strengthen their capacities, including conducting national risk assessments and designing policies to address any vulnerabilities.

In addition, increasing the participation of civil society would help enhance early warning and ensure the effectiveness of national human rights institutions and ombudspersons, he added.

“Our over-arching challenge is to uphold the principle while preventing its mis-use,” said Mr. Guterres: “That means acting promptly, preventively, diplomatically, before situations escalate and spiral out of control.”

The Secretary-General also urged all Member States to “ratify and domesticate” instruments of international law relating to the prohibition and prevention of the atrocity crimes.

Of the 193 UN Member States, 45 are yet to ratify the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which was adopted in 1948 and entered into force in early 1951. The Convention defines genocide in legal terms and underlines the need to hold those responsible for the reprehensible act to justice.

Prevention at the core of the responsibility to protect – General Assembly President

Also addressing the meeting, General Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák recalled that in the years since the 2005 World Summit and the adoption by the Assembly of a resolution on the issue in 2009, today’s gathering was the body’s first formal meeting on the principle.

“So, I think it is a good time to [remind ourselves of the weight on our shoulders](#),” he said.

The Assembly President also stressed that prevention lies at the core of the responsibility to protect.

“[It means] to do everything we can to avoid reaching the point where humanity is lost,” he said, noting that while prevention may be “hard work;

but it is worth it.”

He also highlighted the link between the responsibility to protect and the [UN Charter](#).

“We have all committed, through the Charter’s first line, to save future generations from the scourge of war. And the responsibility to protect is based on this very objective,” he said.

[Security Council urged to act with ‘one strong voice’ on raft of ills plaguing Middle East and North Africa](#)

Ambassadors in the [Security Council](#) have been urged by the United Nations Secretary-General to find ‘much-needed consensus’ to resolve the myriad challenges in the Middle East and North Africa.

António Guterres issued the call during a debate in the chamber on Monday, [focusing on](#) the various fault-lines in the region.

“[Decades-old conflicts](#), together with new ones, as well as deep-rooted social grievances, a shrinking of democratic space and the emergence of terrorism and new forms of violent extremism, are undermining peace, sustainable development and human rights,” he said.

“The territorial integrity of countries like Syria, Yemen and Libya is under threat. Millions of people have been forcibly displaced from their homes. And the impacts of this instability have spread to neighbors and beyond.”

Mr. Guterres reminded the Council of the numerous crises across the region, starting with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – the central issue at the heart of what he called ‘the Middle Eastern quagmire.’

He reiterated the UN’s support for a two-state solution that would allow both communities to live side-by-side in peace: something that also is essential for security and stability in the entire region.

Meanwhile, the ongoing war in Syria has subjected civilians to “a litany of atrocities”, including sieges, starvation, widespread displacement and the use of chemical weapons.

The UN chief further stated that the conflict has become ‘a battleground for proxy wars’, with regional and international actors taking part.

“More than ever, our aim is to see a united and democratic Syria, to avoid

irreparable sectarianism, and to ensure full respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to enable the Syrian people to freely decide on the country's future," Mr. Guterres told the 15 ambassadors.

Moving on to Yemen, the UN chief highlighted recent efforts by his Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, to avoid an escalation in violence. He also spoke of UN engagement in Libya, including support for a national dialogue process that has revealed citizens' deep longing for peace and to exit the period of transitional governance.

Mr. Guterres also praised Iraq's 'resilience' in recent years, citing victory over the extremist group, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh), as an example of how the nation has overcome the risk of fragmentation.

"Iraq's endurance as a stable, federal state is a testament to the enormous sacrifices of the Iraqi people, from all communities," he said. "And I strongly hope that the Iraqi institutions will be able to ensure an adequate conclusion of the electoral process able in a way that fully respects the will of the Iraqi people.

Lebanon also was praised for its respect for diversity. The Secretary-General said he looked forward to the formation of a new Government there, following peaceful parliamentary elections last month – the first in nearly a decade.

On the region as a whole, Mr. Guterres recalled that Cold War rivals still found ways to talk to each other and cooperate, indicating that countries in the Middle East and North Africa could pursue a similar path.

He also urged Council members to find "much-needed consensus and to act with one strong voice", adding that regional organizations can also contribute to efforts towards preventive diplomacy, mediation and confidence-building.

"The region needs to ensure the integrity of the State, its governance systems and the equal application of the rule of law that protects all individuals," he said.

"Majorities should not feel the existential threat of fragmentation, and minorities should not feel the threat of oppression and exile. And everyone, everywhere, should enjoy their right to live in dignity, freedom and peace."

[New UN-supported farming app is cream of crop in tackling Sahel pest](#)

Farmers in sub-Saharan Africa have a new digital weapon in their agricultural armoury to take on the [Fall Armyworm](#) – a crop pest that's threatening the

food security of 300 million people – the United Nations said on Monday.

Launched by the [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#) and [Pennsylvania State University](#), the talking [mobile phone app](#) – whose name is *Nuru* – can identify the insect, which is in fact a caterpillar.

“Many African farmers might have heard about Fall Armyworm but are seeing it for the first time,” FAO said in a statement. “Often (they are) unable to recognize it or unsure of what they are facing.”

Thanks to the Nuru app, identifying a Fall Armyworm infestation is as simple as holding a mobile phone next to a sick plant.

Confirmation is immediate, FAO says, adding that the software works on a standard Android phone.

Soon, in addition to English, Nuru will be able to speak Swahili, French and Twi.

New languages will be added “all the time”, the UN agency noted, so it will be “walking (farmers) through the process of checking their crops...reporting back on infestation levels and giving them advice on how to fight the pest”.

Another important feature of the app is that it can work offline, “so farmers can use it whenever they want it”, said David Hughes, professor of Entomology and Biology at Pennsylvania State University. “Nuru is like an extension officer who is always there for the farmers, in their fields,” he added.

Fall Armyworm – *Spodoptera frugiperda* – is native to tropical and subtropical regions of the Americas.

The insect first appeared in West Africa in 2016, then spread rapidly across all countries in sub-Saharan Africa in 2017, infecting millions of hectares of maize.

The bug prefers maize, but can feed on more than 80 species of plants, including rice, sorghum, millet, sugarcane, vegetable crops and cotton.

Because of trade and the moth’s strong flying ability, it has the potential to spread further, the UN agency warns.

[Resettlement needs set to rise to 1.4 million people in 2019, UN refugee](#)

agency reports

Close to 1.4 million people will need resettlement in countries free from war and persecution in 2019, the UN refugee agency, said on Monday, citing growing forced displacement across the globe.

Resettlement – the transfer of refugees from the country where they have claimed asylum to a safe “third country” – is the responsibility of international agencies, including [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#).

Noting a 17 per cent projected overall increase in needs next year, the UN agency’s [Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2019 report](#) warns that access to this “key, durable solution” for those in need of international protection is extremely limited.

Refugees from [36 nationalities are in need of resettlement](#) out of a total of 65 international operations, the UNHCR report states.

For the third year in a row, refugees from Syria are set to have the highest resettlement requirements, at more than 600,000 people.

This represents a 26 per cent increase on current needs.

Regionally, Africa is likely to remain the region with the highest projected resettlement needs next year, led by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

According to the UNHCR report, 163,000 people from DRC will be in need of international resettlement in 2019 – a 10 per cent increase on 2018.

In South Sudan, meanwhile, continued instability and violence are behind a 71 per cent increase in needs, with 158,000 individuals out of more than 2.4 million refugees expected to require shelter in a third country next year.

Elsewhere on the African continent, protracted instability will continue to affect “Congolese, Somalis, Sudanese and Eritreans”.

In Asia, meanwhile, resettlement needs stand at 102,146 – a one per cent increase from 2018.

The picture is very different in Europe, where those in need of shelter in a third country is set to increase by almost 40 per cent next year, from more than 300,000 this year, to some 420,750 in 2019.

Over 95 per cent of this requirement is represented by Syrian refugees in Turkey.

In the Middle East and North Africa region, resettlement needs are projected at 271,297 people in 2019 – a slight decrease from this year.

Reflecting the inclusion of “high-risk protection cases” from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, projected resettlement needs in the Americas region in 2019 are forecast to rise 123 per cent in 2019, to just over 4,000 people.

The need to expand resettlement was acknowledged by all UN Member States in the September 2016 [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#).

Despite this, the UNHCR report notes recent “fluctuations” in State resettlement quotas which have seen quotas grow from 2012 to 2016, only to see a “steep reversal” in 2017, when only 75,200 refugees were offered resettlement globally.

Because of this development, the UN refugee agency is preparing to focus on three major crises in 2019: countries hosting large numbers of refugees; central Mediterranean migration; and resettlement out of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt linked to the Syria conflict.