

UK continues to be among top donors to UNRWA

Many thanks, Madam Chair, and our thanks too to the Commissioner-General for his briefing.

We have heard today about the challenges facing UNRWA, in particular the ongoing financial insecurity of the agency and the unpredictable context in which UNRWA operates. We have also heard about the positive impact that UNRWA's services have on the lives of Palestinian refugees and have seen for ourselves the bright hope for the future. In Hanan and Hatem, two impressive ambassadors for the UNRWA school system, we thank them for their powerful testimony. The UK remains a strong supporter of UNRWA. We recognise its unique mandate from the General Assembly to protect and provide essential health and education services to Palestinian refugees across the Middle East. And we know that UNRWA is a vital humanitarian and stabilising force in the region.

The UK has consistently been among UNRWA's top donors, in 2018 in recognition of UNRWA's, severe financial constraints. We increased our planned support from £33.5 million to £65.5 million, and encourage other donors to step up their contributions. We recognise that until a permanent solution is found, Palestinian refugees need UNRWA to be on a more secure financial footing to ensure that their basic needs are met. To that end, the UK is working with UNRWA and other donors to broaden UNRWA's base of donor income, continue with program reforms and to encourage multi-year funding commitments. Indeed, it was good to hear the Commissioner-General recommit to reform efforts earlier today. They have resulted in impressive savings over recent years, and UNRWA has made strides in finding new sources of income. But as the number of refugees grows, balancing the books will remain an ever present challenge.

We remain concerned about the impact that this year's funding shortfall will have on UNRWA's essential services and humanitarian relief. That is why I'm pleased to announce – in line with the Secretary-General's request this morning – that the UK intends to again increase our planned level of funding this year to match the £65.5 million we provided in 2018. This UK aid about \$84 million, will help to provide essential services, including healthcare and education for millions of Palestinian refugees – living in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank. As well as cash and basic food supplies for the most vulnerable Palestinian refugees in Gaza and in Syria. We will also bring forward our payment to July to help with UNRWA's cash flow. As last year, we would like to encourage other countries to consider whether they, too, can increase their funding to UNRWA at this difficult time.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the Commissioner-General and the staff of UNRWA for their continuing dedication to serving the needs of the Palestinian refugees. No one expected UNRWA to be here for more than 70 years. The fact that it is reminds us all of the importance of finding a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for Palestinian refugees. The UK

is clear that the status of Palestinian refugees must be agreed as part of the wider peace negotiations. Until that time, the UK remains firmly committed to supporting the UN Relief and Works Agency and Palestinian refugees across the Middle East.

Thank you, Madam Chair.