

**Speech by H.E. Mr. Jean Asselborn,
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs**

**Extraordinary Ministerial Conference "Preserving Dignity and Sharing Responsibility -
Mobilizing Collective Action for UNRWA"**

Rome, 15th of March 2018

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Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. Commissioner-General,
Dear Colleagues,

I first want to thank the governments of Sweden, Jordan and Egypt for convening this timely extraordinary ministerial conference, as well as the government of Italy for its hospitality.

Dear Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl, your task is not only very important, but it is also an example of humanitarian policy in these nervous times on our planet. I visited Gaza four times, the first time in 2004 when the Foreign ministry of the Palestinians still was in Gaza and the plans of the Airport and the Seaport had not yet been abandoned – same century but more hopeful times. I am aware of your difficulties and this should be a meeting to support you personally, to support UNRWA and to give hope to those whose life simply depends on UNRWA.

While this is not UNRWA's first financial crisis – there have been far too many already – it is the most dramatic one to date. UNRWA provides social services to 5.3 million Palestine refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, where many of them have become refugees a second time. The US decision to drastically reduce its financial contribution is putting the delivery of those essential services at risk. In the coming months, this could deprive over half a million children of their right to education, or disrupt UNRWA's health services for 3.5 million people. This cannot be in anybody's interest.

Particularly in Gaza, where due to a decade-old blockade, three wars and delayed reconstruction efforts, 80% of the population depend on humanitarian aid, UNRWA services are vital for the stability and the economic survival of the population.

Luxembourg has always been a reliable and predictable partner of UNRWA. We encourage all donors to give their voluntary contributions in a predictable and regular manner. In 2015 and 2017, my country mobilised extraordinary contributions, in total 1.5 million euros, in order to help UNRWA overcome previous financial difficulties.

The voluntary contributions in our current multiannual agreement covering the years 2016-2018 amount to 11.25 million euros with additional funding of 3.5 million euros through projects and extraordinary contributions.

Against the backdrop of the current crisis, Luxembourg has advanced significant parts of this year's payment. Efforts to mobilize an extraordinary contribution this year are currently ongoing and a new project in the health sector is in preparation. Luxembourg also stands ready to increase its voluntary contributions to UNRWA in the next strategic partnership agreement from 2019 to 2021.

Beyond the current emergency, we have to renew efforts to set UNRWA on a more sustainable financial basis, including, among other options, through the regular budget of the United Nations.

The international community must come together in this hour of need and demonstrate its solidarity with Palestine and the Palestine refugees. It is simply unacceptable to keep the most vulnerable hostage to unrelated political issues. Instead of blaming the victims and the UN agency that provides essential services to them, we should do our utmost to preserve the hope and dignity of the Palestine refugees, 70 years after the Nakba, the mass expulsion of the population of Palestine in 1948.

I thank you for your attention.