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PRESS RELEASE

THE EU CONTRIBUTES EURO 12 MILLION TO IMPROVE THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF PALESTINE REFUGEES IN LEBANON

The European Union will further support UNRWA in its endeavours to alleviate the dire living conditions of Palestine refugees in Lebanon through a new programme for a total budget of euro 12 million. This programme, which will be implemented by UNRWA, aims at providing adequate shelter to the most vulnerable Palestine refugee families living in Lebanon, by securing funds for the rehabilitation of shelters in Palestinian camps throughout Lebanon and by paying cash rental subsidies in 2011 and 2012 to the families waiting to return to their reconstructed houses in Nahr el-Bared Camp (NBC).

The programme will benefit over 3 000 families displaced from NBC in addition to an estimated 736 families residing in the other 11 Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon. A socio-economic survey conducted last year confirmed that dire housing conditions affect the majority of Palestine refugees in Lebanon and contribute to the prevalence of chronic illnesses among the refugees. Over 4 000 shelters across Lebanon are in need of rehabilitation. The same study found that 66% of the refugees live in poverty.

The proposed action will be financed by the Instrument for Stability (IfS), which is the EU mechanism to respond to crises, facilitate recovery processes and pre-empt further relapses. In 2008 and 2009, the EU already mobilised the IfS to support UNRWA operations in North Lebanon to create the pre-conditions for the re-construction of NBC and the revival of the decimated local economy.

EU's continuing support to UNRWA is an essential element of the EU strategy for the Middle East Peace Process to alleviate the hardship of the refugee population in Lebanon and, therefore, contribute to the stability of the region. The EU and its Member States are the biggest donors to UNRWA. Together with humanitarian aid, support from the IfS and from the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI), the EU has disbursed more than euro 64 million in support of Palestine refugees in Lebanon over the last four years.

On this occasion, EU Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst, said "It is our duty to provide the most vulnerable and neglected groups in society with the minimum standards of dignity, and support to Palestine refugees in Lebanon is therefore of importance to the EU." She added that "the EU reiterates the need to make further progress in order to improve the Lebanese legislative framework in order to guarantee proper living conditions for the Palestinian population that has been forced to live away from their homeland for more than 60 years."

Thanking the European Union for its long-standing support, the Director of UNRWA Affairs in Lebanon, Salvatore Lombardo, said: "This is an immensely important contribution. It will enable us to improve the lives of vulnerable families living in unhealthy or unsafe housing conditions

throughout the country. The families from Nahr el Bared who will benefit from the rental subsidies lost their homes in the camp's destruction four years ago. They are waiting for their homes to be rebuilt as part of the camp's reconstruction.”

UNRWA provides assistance, protection and advocacy for some 5 million Palestine refugees in the Middle East registered with the Agency in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Occupied Territories. The Agency's services encompass education, health care, relief, camp infrastructure and improvement, community support, microfinance and emergency response, including in times of armed conflict.