

**Speech of Alexis Loeber
Head of the Cooperation section
at the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

**Launching of the project “New Education Perspectives for
Children with Special Learning Needs”**

UNESCO Palace, Beirut, 26 June 2014

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Representatives of national and local authorities,

Representatives of the Palestinian popular committees and factions,

Dear teachers,

Dear parents,

Dear students,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very glad to be here to launch, in the name of Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon, the project “New Education Perspectives for Children with Special Learning Needs” funded by the European Union, and implemented by World Vision, Mussawat and Community-Based Rehabilitation Association (CBRA).

Investing in education is the best choice communities can make. That is why the European Union dedicates a substantial part of its cooperation efforts to this sector, from basic to higher education, to vocational education and training. The EU is the first donor to UNRWA education activities in Lebanon and the region.

In view of providing the necessary support for the education sector, the European Union launched a call for proposals in 2013 for organisations working in non-formal education for Palestinians. By the end of last year, a total of four projects for an amount of almost 2 million Euros were selected. One of them was the intervention proposed by World Vision, Mussawat and CBRA that we are launching today.

This project contributes to mobilising and supporting relevant stakeholders in the refugee community (parents, youth, and children nurseries) to improve the learning environment of children with special learning needs.

Another project that was selected under the aforementioned call for proposals is being implemented by the Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement (IECD) and also deals with Palestinian children with disabilities, complementing this action.

Our support to these initiatives is rooted in the European Union's commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities, to help them become an integrated and equal part of society, and based on the conviction that the lack of education condemns young people, and more so children with special needs, to exclusion and to limited social and economic prospects.

We firmly believe that persons with disabilities should be able to live with dignity as active, independent citizens. They should have access to education, training and employment opportunities.

The role of parents of children with special learning needs and of teachers and their communities in this effort is absolutely key.

We consider that this project encourages all stakeholders, to join forces in that direction and we hope that it will achieve the much needed results.

The European Union will continue to support people with disabilities, within the EU and around the world, and especially Palestinians, in order to contribute to

overcoming all the challenges they face in their daily life, and to guarantee their right to education and full and equal participation in society and economy according to the principle of equal opportunities, which we also uphold in the European Union.

Thank you to all those involved in this project for your efforts and commitment and also thank you to the audience for being here today.