

**Speech by Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst**

**Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

**Ground Breaking Ceremony**

***EU-funded project "Reconstruction of the Mohajareen Area in Nahr al-Bared"***

Wednesday 7 November 2012

\*\*\*\*\*

*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you here present today for this ground breaking ceremony of the reconstruction of the Mohajareen Area in Nahr al-Bared. It is with a bitter sweet sentiment that I am joining you today to celebrate this occasion.

The European Union has been, for many years now, providing support to the Palestine refugees in Lebanon.

We believe that improved living conditions and the promotion of fundamental social and economic rights are essential conditions for refugees to live with dignity.

In Lebanon we focus our support on improving the physical living conditions in the camps and on providing children and youth, who constitute over half of the Palestinian population in the country, better education opportunities.

Indeed following the complete destruction of Nahr al-Bared Camp and surrounding areas in 2007, the European Union alone has committed until now 44 million Euros to support reconstruction and provide relief aid to the affected Palestinian population.

One of the concrete examples of our action is our contribution to the rebuilding of the the Mohajereen area. For this area alone, the contribution of the European Union stands at three and a half million Euros. This ceremony marks the commencement of the rebuilding works that should have already begun two years ago and should have provided appropriate housing to 111 Palestine refugee families, former residents of Mohajareen who were displaced in 2007.

The displacement situation for these families has been long and painful and further prolonged by the challenges encountered in the preparation phase for this reconstruction.

In fact, programme activities started back in August 2009 with the design

of and preparation for construction works. Together with our partners, the Norwegian Refugee Council and UNRWA, we had to overcome many administrative obstacles to obtain the approval of the Master Plan and the corresponding issuance of construction permits. In this process, several alterations to the initial programme took place, including the provision of additional funds, the extension of the period of implementation and the re-tendering of works.

Naturally, we are relieved to see that reconstruction work is finally about to begin. Most importantly, we hope to see it completed in due time to avoid more unnecessary suffering to the refugee families.

The situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is not easy: it is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that the improvement of daily living conditions helps to alleviate tensions and frustrations.

The stability of the camps and surrounding regions depends on ensuring that Palestine refugees, in particular the young generation, have hope for the future, which comes in part from living in a safe, healthy and dignified environment.

We will continue to work as we have been doing in the past, with all stakeholders, not only in improving the physical environment , but also for the promotion of a policy and a legal framework in which a constructive

dialogue between the Lebanese people and the Palestinian refugee community can provide greater mutual benefits.

I would like to thank the Lebanese authorities, in particular the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, UNRWA and its legal services, the Member States of the European Union, the Palestinian community and our programme partners, in particular the Norwegian Refugee Council for their continued commitment.

Thank you.