

Handover ceremony
Mohajareen – Nahr el Bared

Speech of the Head of the Delegation of the European Union
Ambassador Angelina EICHHORST

19 February 2014

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Excellency, President of the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee,
Your Excellency, Ambassador of Palestine,
Ambassadors of European Union Member States,
Representatives of national and local authorities,
Mr. Mayor,
Representatives of the popular committees,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Rarely a project financed by the European Union in Lebanon has faced so many constraints and so many challenges.

Rarely has a development action involved such a large number of Lebanese, Palestinian, international actors: politicians, policy makers, technicians, consultants, operators, donors ... and of course the families of refugees.

This project is the result of our strong collaboration, and I sincerely thank you all. I applaud the Norwegian Refugee Council who initiated, supported and steered the reconstruction to completion.

It is the only reconstruction operation of this scale, beyond the limits of the Nahr el Bared Palestinian refugee camp, supported by the international community.

More than a hundred families, after having been exiled sometimes three or four times, in often dramatic circumstances, will finally live in decent shelters.

Since 2007, the European Union and the Member states have actively mobilised all its instruments to contribute to the reconstruction of Nahr el Bared.

Our commitment has been constant and diverse: immediate humanitarian assistance to support 30,000 refugees, technical assistance in the planning and development of the camp, technical assistance to the Prime Minister's office to coordinate the whole reconstruction, substantial and on-going support to UNRWA for the building of several blocks and packages, management of rents for refugees ... And I wish to confirm that we have just agreed an additional 12 million Euros for the reconstruction by UNRWA of a new package in the camp.

Mohajareen, which in Arabic means "displaced", reminds us of the importance of providing and guaranteeing minimum rights for all, including for refugee families. The support of the European Union for the reconstruction of Nahr el Bared in fact is part of the close cooperation between the European Union and UNRWA. The EU remains the largest supporter for Palestinian refugees, including in Lebanon through the fundings of community infrastructure, water, sanitation, health centers and shelters in the camps, as well as through a wide-reaching education programme comprising scholarships. Since 2005 with our support, UNRWA allowed 443 Palestinian students to pursue university studies. The European Union and Member States also remain the largest contributors to UNRWA general budget.

The resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is and remains a priority for Europe, and the presence today of several EU Ambassadors and representatives shows our commitment to continue our unwavering support to the negotiations currently led by Secretary Kerry. We support a two-State solution with an independent, democratic, viable Palestinian State living side-by-side with Israel and its other neighbours. In concrete terms, the EU is considering how best we could provide unprecedented assistance for both sides in the event that they are able to reach an agreement. This would have lasting benefits for all the people of the region, including here in Lebanon.

Thank you for your attention.