



Press Release  
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## **The European Union and the Ministry for Social Affairs host an Iftar at the SOS Children's Village in Bethlehem**

**Today, the EU Representative, Mr John Gatt-Rutter, and the Minister of Social Affairs, HE Shawqi Al-Aissa, joined for iftar the children of the SOS Children's village in Bethlehem. Local officials and social workers from the Ministry of Social Affairs in Bethlehem who are working on the national cash transfer programme also attended the event. This is the first among eleven iftars that the European Union and the Ministry of Social Affairs are organizing in the West Bank and Gaza for beneficiaries of the cash transfer programme. The EU is the main donor of the programme.**

"As the lead donor in the social protection sector in Palestine, the substantial work which has been undertaken by the Ministry of Social Affairs in terms of strategic planning, policy design and institutional capacity building has been a major investment for the EU for the last years. And it remains so in 2015. This year, the EU and other donors (Spain and Austria) are contributing with €52.5 million to almost half of the cost of social allowances to families in need in the West bank and Gaza, ," said **the European Union Representative, Mr John Gatt-Rutter**. "I would also like to take this opportunity to recall our work in Gaza, where €10 million of our contribution this year will be allocated to provide immediate relief and support the resilience of households that have been pulled down into further poverty as a result of the 2014 hostilities. This support will help around 10,000 families over the course of one year, until a more sustainable solution is found to ensure their livelihood in safety and dignity. This is however hardly enough. Almost a year after the end of the hostilities, the needs in Gaza remain great, with at least 30,000 families in dire need of cash and in-kind assistance to ensure their access to basic necessities."

The European Union will be contributing with nearly €13.5 million to this year's second payment of social allowances to poor and vulnerable Palestinian families in the West Bank and Gaza. The **contribution**, channelled through PEGASE<sup>[1]</sup>, includes funds from the EU budget (€12.50 million) and Spain (€1 million).

Palestinian households living in extreme poverty receive assistance through the national cash transfer programme administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The programme provides a basic safety-net to the poorest and most vulnerable Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza through cash and in-kind assistance.

This contribution covers over 40% of the total cost of providing cash assistance to over 122,000 households living in poverty. Nearly 70% live in Gaza.

## **Background**

Most of the European Union's assistance to the Palestinian Authority is channelled through PEGASE, the financial mechanism launched in 2008 to support the PA Reform and Development Plan (2008-2010) and subsequent Palestinian national plans. As well as helping to meet a substantial proportion of its running costs, European funds support major reform and development programmes in key ministries, to help prepare the PA for statehood. Since February 2008, around €1.8 billion have been disbursed through the PEGASE Direct Financial Support programmes. In addition, the EU has provided assistance to the Palestinian people through UNRWA and a wide range of cooperation projects.

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