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European Union provides EUR 3.6 million to the support access to and utilization of land and water in the West Bank

The European Union announced today a new European Union contribution of €3.6 million to support the access to and the utilization of land and water. The inauguration ceremony took place at the Solman pool Conference Hall in al Khader – Bethlehem in the presence of Bethlehem Governor, Mr Jibren Bakri; Minister of Agriculture, Mr Shawqi Issa, Mr John Gatt-Rutter, EU Representative, and UWAC Representative, Mr Khalid Hedmi.

The 28 month-long project stems from a close coordination with the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture and is in line with the Strategic Objectives and the Action Plan of the 2014-2016 Agriculture Sector Strategy *'Resilience and Development'*. In particular, the intervention is aligned to the Strategy's first and second objectives that aim to ensure farmers' resilience and an efficient and sustainable management of the natural resources. On the other hand, the project complements and looks for synergisms with a similar on-going intervention financed by the Dutch Cooperation through the Netherlands Representative Office (NRO).

The project that takes the short name of 'Juthoor' (the Arabic name for 'roots') aims to sustain livelihood of vulnerable female and male farmers living in marginalized areas through improving access to sustainable agriculture resources (land, water and human skills).

The priority components of 'Juthoor' include land development of un-utilized land for agricultural purposes, construction & rehabilitation of agricultural roads, increase the access to and availability of water, support a better water demand-management, building capacity of beneficiaries in good farming practices, and maintenance of assets delivered. Women empowerment is a key crosscutting element of all project's activities.

In particular, amongst other, the EU project will develop more than 2,200 dunums for agricultural or livestock production, and build 60,000 square

meters of retaining walls and more than 100 rain fed water cisterns. In addition, seventy kilometres of roads will be constructed or rehabilitated to facilitate access to land and markets. Moreover, community based organizations; cooperatives and farmers associations will receive support and training in different agriculture aspects from institutional management to agriculture practices to access to local and international markets.

"The European Union support to the agriculture sector has the final aim of building an enabling environment for the private sector to operate and invest in agriculture production which is intended to generate income and employment. At the same time, it should help the Palestinians to stay and cultivate their land in difficult circumstances ," said the **EU Representative, John Gatt-Rutter** at the inauguration ceremony.

For further details please contact:

**The Office of the European Union Representative, West Bank and Gaza Strip,
UNRWA**

Shadi Othman, Tel: +972 (0) 2 541 5867, Mob: +972 (0) 599 673 958

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