



**STATEMENT BY FILIPPO GRANDI
COMMISSIONER-GENERAL OF UNRWA
ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD REFUGEE DAY
BRUSSELS, 21 JUNE 2011**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To mark World Refugee Day, I have chosen to speak on the theme of protection – the protection of the rights of the Palestine refugees we serve in UNRWA’s five fields of operation – Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. This special day reminds us of the trauma faced by all refugees around the world who have been uprooted by violence, persecution or conflict. This is an experience which reverberates among the Palestine refugees we at UNRWA serve. They are indeed a vulnerable population, made more so by the volatile political landscape they inhabit.

Refugees are forced to leave behind everything that most of us take for granted: home, friends, loved ones, sense of belonging, everything that is familiar. Nobody should have to undergo such trauma. For many at least there is hope for a better future and light at the end of the tunnel of displacement and dispossession that characterizes the refugee condition. Unfortunately, Palestine refugees are unique in having an unresolved, 64 year old political plight. This is why we constantly appeal to the peace-makers to address the issues that would give them the protection they need and deserve.

Sixty four years after their original displacement, UNRWA, together with our partners in other UN agencies, NGOs, national authorities, donors and the wider international community, continues to strive to provide for the material needs and to contribute to the protection of the fundamental rights of approximately five million Palestine refugees. Addressing these issues takes commitment and action. International solidarity and cooperation must be at the foundation of our response. This is especially so at a time when global economic problems are putting pressure on humanitarian and development budgets. In that regard I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the support that the European Union has been providing to UNRWA in our efforts to address the needs and safeguard and advance the rights of Palestine refugees.

However, these efforts can only serve to alleviate, to a certain degree, the consequences of the continuing lack of a political solution. These consequences are felt most severely in the occupied Palestinian territory, where Palestine refugees continue on a daily basis to experience dispossession



and displacement as a result of a pervasive regime of restrictions of movement, house demolitions, expropriation of Palestinian lands and natural resources, expansion of settlements which are illegal under international law, a separation barrier that deviates deep inside the West Bank and the blockade on Gaza that was tightened five years ago and which chronically undermines Palestinian human development in spite of its welcome but still insufficient easing.

These obstacles to the legitimate aspirations of Palestinian civilians to live a normal life require a concerted political response to ensure respect of international law that has often been lacking.

Finding solutions to end the occupation, peacefully resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and put an end to this most protracted of refugee situations are now more vital than ever. These must be inclusive, allowing for refugee representation, and must address the question of Palestine refugees in a manner consistent with their rights. Refugees must be present in this process and their voice must be heard. Their role and input are essential for any peace agreement be truly “just and durable”.

UNRWA, with the support of ECHO is helping Palestine refugees tell their own story; have their voices heard and advocate for the protection of their own rights. For that reason we have today brought three representatives of Palestine refugees to speak to you. Ms Shereen Araj, from the village of Al Walaje Mr Sameer Abdel Latif from Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem And Mr Mohamed Alkorshan from the Bedouin community of Area C in the West Bank

They came not to talk about UNRWA, but to talk about their own lives as refugees. After hearing them, try to understand what it means to be a Palestine refugee today. Unfortunately their stories are not unusual, but are in fact emblematic of the ongoing trauma faced by Palestinians today in the oPt.

Let us all continue to strive to ensure that all people displaced by conflict and upheaval get the support they need to build a better life. Let us strive also to give our full attention to finding a long overdue solution to the plight of Palestine refugees, so that they may also see an end to so many years of dispossession and displacement.

Thank you.