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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Human rights situation in Palestine and other
occupied Arab territories**

Written statement* submitted by The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 May 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Covid-19 and its impact on Palestinian refugees

The easing of quarantine measures in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and camps has left Palestinian refugees out of isolation without taking the necessary precautions to avoid being infected with the Coronavirus.

With the decline in the services of UNRWA, fears increased about the deterioration of the health and nutritional status of the Palestinian refugees. UNRWA increased its contacts to obtain assistance that would enable it to provide support to refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Lebanon.

UNRWA Crisis

Elizabeth Campbell, the director of the agency's office in Washington argued that the biggest danger facing UNRWA now is the funds that the agency has are sufficient to operate until the end of May only, as a result of the United States of America decision to suspend its funding to the agency that provides assistance to the 5.5 million Palestinian refugees.

UNRWA, which only received a third of its \$ 1.2 billion annual budget, is now facing the worst financial crisis since it began operations nearly 70 years ago, at a time when its estimated budget in 2020 is \$ 1.4 billion.

The agency is facing additional burdens due to the crisis caused by the pandemic, which “distracted” donor countries through their national concerns at this stage in containing the epidemic. UNRWA has been suffering from a financial crisis since last year, which increased with the beginning of this year, forcing it to take a decision to reduce the services provided to refugees.

As a result of the national policies of the host countries of the Palestinians refugees including closing schools and adopting the distance learning system, all UNRWA schools as well as the vocational training centers are still closed. This would affect nearly half a million school students.

Given that refugee communities in many host countries originally suffer from a low standard of living, these students are now threatened that they will not have access to quality and equitable education.

Economic crises

Moreover, Palestinian refugees are now suffering from unemployment as a result of the suspension of all economic activities in which they work, such as maintenance and rehabilitation of housing, construction work, public driving and crafts in all its forms. This threatens the Palestinian refugees to live a decent and safe life in which food, housing and clothing are available.

All of these challenges, if neglected, will be exacerbated. UNRWA needs to provide aid and support its operations so that Palestinian refugees can obtain their basic rights to health, food and education, at least.

Contracts of Day Laborers

UNRWA spokespersons have announced the Agency’s decision to lay off day workers (staff hired and paid one day at a time) after UNRWA has had its operations curtailed in its five fields of operations in response to COVID-19 outbreaks.

Such a decision is arbitrary and unjust and it will affect thousands of UNRWA staff who are the sole breadwinners for their cash-stripped families, particularly in the besieged Gaza Strip and war-torn Syria. A suspension of their daily wages means that hundreds of children, women, and disabled persons risk to become deprived of vital items, including food and life-saving medicines.

Conclusion

PRC is deeply concerned about the situations of the Palestinians refugees during the pandemic. PRC calls on member of the Human Rights Council to work on supporting Palestinian refugees during this crisis.

The United Nations and donor parties should also take their share in such a humanitarian struggle for survival undergone by over 5 million Palestine refugees registered with the Agency. The need for financial, medical, and humanitarian assistance has become more urgent than ever at this critical stage.

If serious measures are not taken to protect Palestinian refugee workers and their families who continue to struggle for a living, the consequences will not be very much less tragic than those wrought by the Coronavirus pandemic.

PRC highlights the importance to urgently find a political solution for the matter of Palestinian refugees. The humanitarian crisis is nothing but a consequence of the absence of a concrete political plan to allow the Palestinians to enjoy their Right of Return as well as their internationally recognized human rights.
