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### Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to  
achieve sustainable development for all**

### **Statement submitted by Palestinian Return Centre, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### Assessing Poverty among Palestinian Refugees in the Middle East: Challenges and Prospects

The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) would like to bring to the attention of the international community the situation of Palestinian refugees suffering from high levels of poverty and extreme poverty.

The Palestinian refugee issue is considered one of the largest and most long-standing humanitarian cases. The Palestinian refugee question emerged as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and Palestinians are currently the largest refugee population in the world.

In the recent proposal of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 193 UN Member States unanimously committed to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. In the proposal for the SDGs it is stated that “Poverty eradication is the greatest global challenge facing the world today”. Poverty is generally known to be among the many issues faced by people who are forced to flee their homes and communities because of violent conflict or persecution. Refugees suffer physical, economical and emotional trauma, which have long-term effects on their ability to quickly recover.

### Poverty among Palestinian Refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Economic growth among the Palestinian population is fragile. Within the West Bank and Gaza, GDP has reached a low of -0.4%, pushing the Palestinian economy into recession. Palestinians are being denied the rights to development, causing rising poverty and despair as tensions increase.

Michael Lynk, the Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), stated that Gaza has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the world and the situation is worsening as the economy stagnates. He also added that “The Palestinian economy is without parallel in the modern world”, he added, delivering his report to the UN General Assembly in New York. “Poverty is rising. Unemployment is rising to epic levels. Food insecurity is becoming more acute. The Palestinian economy is becoming more stifled and less viable under the occupation.”

The restrictions that the occupation impose in order to facilitate settlement expansion has severe economic repercussions for Palestinians. The World Bank estimates that Palestinians weren’t limited by administrative restrictions, such as on construction and resource extraction in Area C, it could generate \$3.4 billion annually for the Palestinian economy, an increase of 35 per cent in its GDP. The additional revenues would generate \$800 million in government tax receipts, equal to half the Palestinian Authority’s debt.

Unemployment in the Palestinian territories — the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip — stands at 27 per cent, more than double the rate in 1999. In Gaza, the slow pace of reconstruction and continued limits to resources has left Gaza’s economy on the brink of collapse. UNRWA estimates that almost 80 per cent of Gaza’s population is currently aid dependent. In 2013, infant mortality in the OPT

was 15.8 per 1,000 live births. In Gaza, infant mortality rates have risen after a continued decrease, reflecting the long-term effects of the blockade. 95 per cent of electricity in the West bank is imported from Israel, creating a huge dependency and loss of resources. Gaza has its own power generation station, but still remains considerably damaged from the military incursions of 2014 and previous hostilities. Limits to freedom of movement and access to opportunity have also exacerbated inequality in education, gender, poverty, climate change, and water access.

#### Poverty in Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon

Despite their longstanding presence in Lebanon Palestine refugees do not benefit from key aspects of social, political and economic life. This causes Lebanon to have the highest percentage of Palestinian refugees living in extreme poverty. While extreme poverty rates have halved for PRL since 2010 from 6.6 per cent to 3.1 per cent, general poverty rates have remained the same over the past five years at 65 per cent. Poverty affects young refugees most, with 74 per cent of adolescents living in poverty, and five per cent living in extreme poverty.

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are not well integrated into Lebanese society, with restrictions on civil rights. Only 37 per cent of the working age is employed, and 60 per cent of these occupy low status employment. High levels of poverty and lack of opportunity have resulted in high school dropout rates of 39 per cent for over ten year olds.

The influx of Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) has further exacerbated existing problems for the Palestinian population in Lebanon. An estimated 42,000 PRS have entered Lebanon leading to overcrowding of camps that are already overcapacity. An estimated 89 per cent of these PRS live in poverty. UNRWA serves the majority of the Palestinian refugee community healthcare, but is severely understaffed, with an average doctor giving 103 medical consultations every day.

#### Palestinian Refugees in Syria

Previously home to 480,000 to 600,000 Palestinian refugees, the conflict in Syria has greatly affected Palestinian refugees. Syria's GDP is estimated to have contracted by an average of 15.4 per cent and the Syrian economy has plummeted. Those who have fled to neighbouring countries are not afforded the same rights as Syrian refugees, and are in a declining economic situation, with the Syrian pound depreciating by 80 per cent since the start of the conflict. As of 2016, Jordan and Lebanon have effectively closed their borders to Palestinian refugees from Syria.

Food prices have also skyrocketed, with a kilogram of rice nearing US\$ 100 in some areas. In most parts of Syria, electricity is only available for 2-4 hours a day. The lack of reliable electricity supply has affected essential humanitarian services, such as hospitals, schools, and sewage treatment.

#### Palestinian Refugees in Jordan

Though in principle the situation of Palestinian refugees in Jordan is better than that of their counterparts in Lebanon, notably regarding their qualification for citizenship of the host country, according to figures provided recently by the High Committee for the Defence of the Palestinian Right of Return and refugee

representatives in Jordan, 60% of them live below the poverty line, 45% are unemployed and 75% do not own any property where they live.

Research carried out by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA), underlined the way that historical and political legacies manifest themselves in economic hardship in the contemporary world. It was found that poverty among the refugees in Jordan represented a legacy of their inability to generate sufficient income to meet their minimum basic needs.

Recommendations:

- Member States should work towards finding an appropriate solution for the refugees in line with international law. This means conferring Palestinian refugees social, political and economic rights which would help them escape the extreme poverty and the deplorable living conditions in which they currently live.
  - Measures should be taken towards enforcing the right to decent work, to ensure that Palestine refugees rights are improved and applied, and that an improved understanding of existing rights among both refugees and employers is on place.
  - In line with the UN SDGs the international community should act to eradicate poverty from Palestinian refugees across the Middle East.
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