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Addendum

Programme questions: proposed programme budget for 2024

(Item 3 (a))

Programme 22 Palestine refugees

1. At its 14th meeting, on 7 June 2023, the Committee considered programme 22, Palestine refugees, of the proposed programme plan for 2024 and programme performance information for 2022 ([A/78/6 \(Sect. 26\)](#)).
2. The representative of the Secretary-General introduced the programme and responded to questions raised by the Committee during its consideration of the programme.

Discussion

3. Several delegations thanked the representatives of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for their physical presence and virtual presentation of a comprehensive programme plan for 2024. Delegates emphasized their support for the mandate and activities of the Agency while recognizing its crucial role as a stabilizing force in the region, a role that the Agency could not continue to assume without adequate international financial support. In doing so, a delegation reaffirmed its commitment to providing financial support, including multi-year and flexible funding to UNRWA, amounting to €14 million over a period of three years, as it was important to maintain sustainable and predictable funding for UNRWA so it could carry out its work effectively. Continued efforts by the Agency to increase transparency, efficiency and accountability were supported. In December 2021, another delegation had decided to allocate voluntary contributions for UNRWA in the total amount of \$10 million for the period up to 2026. In addition,



a delegation expressed support for a higher contribution equivalent to \$33 million, representing a 20 per cent increase for 2023.

4. With regard to integrating a gender perspective, delegations commended the Agency for its work in mainstreaming gender across its six subprogrammes and for placing particular emphasis on the inclusion of refugees with disabilities. The sustained efforts to minimize the negative impact of the restrictions linked to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, in particular on the education of children and young people, were also commended. In that context, a delegation welcomed the Agency's efforts to develop digital tools and to invest in their accessibility, as well as its ongoing digitization efforts. While the development of the new digital learning platform was supported, the Agency's attention was drawn to the importance of remaining vigilant regarding data protection and the safety of young people online. Information was sought on that aspect of data protection and the measures to be put in place in the future in that regard.

5. A delegation positively assessed the activities of the Agency aimed at providing support to millions of the most vulnerable people. The delegation opined that, from its inception in the mid-twentieth century to the present, the Agency had remained a key specialized source for meeting the basic needs of Palestinian refugees, which included food, shelter, primary health care and education. It was noted that the efforts of UNRWA contributed to the realization of the human potential of internally displaced persons living in difficult conditions. The innovative focus of the Agency's activities, which made it possible to improve the quality of the services provided and their uninterrupted nature, as well as to ensure a flexible response to changing conditions, was also noted. In addition, the focus on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which were a strategic benchmark for the functioning of the entire United Nations system, deserved special attention. Moreover, the delegation recognized the importance of the Agency's staff development programmes, which on one hand contributed to the universalization of specialists, and on the other led to an increase in the qualitative and quantitative indicators of their work, as well as an integrated approach to solving priority tasks. At the same time, the delegation urged UNRWA to be attentive to increases in financial expenses, which led to a greater burden on the Agency's budget. It was pointed out that the main criterion for this policy should be efficiency, especially in the context of existing debts and the general lack of funds for programme implementation.

6. Another delegation expressed support for the programme plan, as it was considered a collective interest to have a strong and effective UNRWA. The view was also expressed that UNRWA was indispensable for the people in need – and was an anchor of overall stability in the region. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the Agency's services, especially its schools and health facilities, were a lifeline to one of the most vulnerable refugee communities, and that the Agency also preserved a sense of hope for the majority of the young people in the region. As a strong supporter of the Agency, the delegation reaffirmed its continued contribution to achieving adequate funding, taking into account that sustainable and predictable funding was crucial to the Agency's work, as underlined during the recent pledge conference. The same delegation was of the view that as long as the Palestine refugee crisis was not resolved, UNRWA remained essential to the provision of services to Palestinian refugees. In that regard, the delegation indicated that efforts would continue to end the conflict and to advocate for a two-State solution, allowing Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace and security.

7. With regard to subprogramme 4, Palestine refugees have improved livelihood opportunities, the same delegation noted that the programme performance related to microfinance services in 2022 was not part of the deliverables for 2024, as was the case in 2021. Clarification was sought on whether the performance indicator was only

used irregularly and if so, the reasons for that. Under subprogramme 6, The most vulnerable Palestine refugees have access to effective social assistance, it was also noted that figure 26.XXI showed decreasing performance indicators for 2023 and 2024 in terms of the number of vulnerable Palestine refugees receiving social transfers. In that regard, the delegation sought clarification on whether that was linked to the financial situation of the Agency or to the addition of the category “Number of vulnerable Palestine refugees who received supplementary cash assistance in Lebanon”.

8. Delegations supported the important humanitarian role of the Agency and expressed appreciation for its contribution to the provision of education, health and social services to the millions of Palestinians living in difficult and often dangerous conditions in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. One delegation was convinced that the Agency served as a key element, for which there were no alternatives, in assisting the Palestinians in both the occupied territory and neighbouring Arab countries until a just settlement of their status was reached within the framework of the resolution of the Palestinian question. It was pointed out that, in the context of periodic outbreaks of violence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the significant destabilization of the situation in neighbouring Arab countries, the needs of Palestinian refugees had increased significantly, and humanitarian assistance remained limited and difficult. At the same time, it was noted that UNRWA served as the only international structure within the United Nations that had been providing assistance to about 5 million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East for more than 70 years. The same delegation expressed its appreciation for the fact that, unlike many international agencies involved in the humanitarian field, the Agency had been able to maintain a very balanced and unbiased line for many decades and, despite external pressure, avoided politicizing its activities and, in general, effectively carried out its extensive mandate in extremely difficult conditions.

9. Several delegations noted the financial difficulties faced by the Agency, and that the need for adequate resources to support its activities was highlighted when this issue was discussed in the administrative and budgetary bodies of the General Assembly. Despite the chronic lack of donor funding, it was important for UNRWA to continue its work in full and in accordance with its mandate, without delegating its functions to other humanitarian actors. In that regard, delegations expressed gratitude to all Member States that had rushed to the rescue and made additional financial commitments, and called on other countries to support UNRWA in a depoliticized manner in order to ensure its sustainable and uninterrupted operation. As a permanent member of the Security Council and an active participant in the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, one delegation indicated that it had consistently advocated for the early resumption of direct Palestinian-Israeli dialogue based on the fact that a final solution could only be reached on a universally recognized international legal basis within the framework of the concept of building two States living in peace and harmony.

10. Another delegation expressed support for the programme, including the extension in December 2022 of the Agency’s mandate until 30 June 2026. It was emphasized that the programme was vital to making progress on human development indicators, meeting the humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees across the Agency’s five fields of operation and contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with a particular focus on Goal 17. The delegation also remained committed to supporting UNRWA until a lasting political solution for Palestinian refugees could be found. Looking ahead to the evaluations planned for 2024, as reflected in paragraph 26.16 of the budget document, it was noted that technical and vocational education services were included, which, in the delegation’s view, should fall under subprogramme 4, Palestine refugees have improved livelihood opportunities.

Owing to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Agency's education system and learning outcomes reflected in table 26.4, additional information was sought regarding the Agency's views on how to evaluate the basic education programme under subprogramme 3, Palestine refugees complete inclusive and equitable quality basic education.

11. A delegation expressed its firm commitment to the Agency's critical humanitarian and human development work, as well as its full support to the UNRWA mission of providing protection, education, health, social services and humanitarian relief to Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the West Bank and Gaza. Appreciation was also expressed to the many nations that had helped UNRWA address critical budget shortfalls and calls were made for those who had not yet provided funding to make robust contributions.

12. A delegation pointed out that, in addition to providing vital services, UNRWA helped to stabilize the region; however, the Agency's annual funding shortfalls undercut its role as a humanitarian partner and stabilizing force. In that regard, the same delegation stressed the need to work together and to develop solutions for those chronic financial shortfalls and to provide stability for the Agency and the Palestinian refugees that depended on it. UNRWA efforts to expand its donor base, including the private sector and partnerships with other United Nations entities and development institutions, were acknowledged. The delegation requested that UNRWA provide further information regarding potential benefits for the Agency that could result from different opportunities and concrete next steps. With regard to cross-cutting, appreciation was expressed for the continued cross-cutting measures already taken and encouragement was given to UNRWA to continue pursuing efficiencies while maintaining high quality services. It was noted that efforts to increase donations and control costs – while still seeking to improve the efficacy of programming – would be key to ensuring sufficient, predictable and sustained funding for UNRWA.

Conclusions and recommendations

13. **The Committee expressed its appreciation for the essential work of UNRWA, which maintained the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance, as well as protection services, for the benefit of 5.9 million registered Palestine refugees, in particular women and children.**

14. **The Committee reiterated that, by alleviating the plight of the Palestine refugees, UNRWA played a vital role for the stability of the region and the viability of the two-State solution. The Committee commended the staff of the Agency for carrying out its invaluable work under an exceptionally difficult security, political and financial environment, as well as throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.**

15. **The Committee supported the efforts of UNRWA to further advance disability inclusion in line with the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.**

16. **The Committee welcomed the proposed strategic outcomes for 2024.**

17. **The Committee supported the efforts of UNRWA to strengthen its partnerships and expand its donor base, including ongoing conversations with the World Bank and other international financial institutions.**

18. **The Committee emphasized the importance for UNRWA of a reliable audit, investigation and evaluation system, in accordance with the “three lines of defence” approach. The Committee stressed that it was important for UNRWA to consider its risk assessment, carried out as part of the enterprise risk**

management and internal control policy,¹ when preparing its programme plans, and encouraged UNRWA to incorporate those risks identified into the external factors of its programme plan, when relevant.

19. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly approve the programme narrative of programme 22, Palestine refugees, of the proposed programme budget for 2024.

¹ [A/66/692](#), annex.