

UN agency says it needs \$800 million a year to assist Palestinians



Palestinian children play at the Shati refugee camp in Gaza City [File: Khalil Hamra/AP]

United Nations, October 2 (RHC)-- The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) said it will seek a new injection of funds at an upcoming donor conference, after it withstood years of financial instability during the administration of former United States President Donald Trump.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini told reporters at the UN headquarters in New York that the organization needed “predictability” for its operations in order to implement “three core activities” – education, health and social services.

The Palestinian refugee agency will seek \$800 million a year at a donor conference scheduled to take place in Brussels next month. The funding will allow the UN agency to run around 700 schools, catering to 550,000 children, as well as health centres and to provide social welfare to Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

Lazzarini said there was also a need for an additional amount, estimated at around \$500,000 in 2022, to cover the humanitarian aid provided by UNRWA. The agency, which assists more than five million Palestinians in the Palestinian territories, Jordan and Lebanon, was \$100 million short to see out this year, and warned that it might have to shut down some activities in November and December.

“Today we keep struggling, running after cash,” Lazzarini said. “I never know as a commissioner-general weeks ahead if I would be able to pay the salaries of 28,000 staff.”

Washington had stopped nearly all aid to UNRWA in 2018 under Trump, who rejected the very idea of Palestinians being refugees. The U.S. had been the single largest donor to the agency, contributing about 30 percent (nearly \$365m) of UNRWA’s annual budget.

The organization was badly wounded from years of budget cuts, but managed to stay intact. Current U.S. President Joe Biden has promised to restore aid to Palestinians and re-establish the goal of a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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