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Presentation by Ambassador Feda Abdelhady-Nasser, Deputy Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations

MAS and University of Exeter Workshop on UNRWA and the UN Assessed Contribution

1. Realities at the UN, Palestine's status and role, and the process and challenges of UN legislation

While it is both desirable and appropriate that the United Nations bear the full cost of the budget of UNRWA – based on the role of the international community, both culpability and responsibility, vis-à-vis the Palestine refugee question and the injustice endured by the Palestinian people as a whole for decades, and based on the need for sustained, predictable and sufficient funding that would reduce or eliminate the cyclical anxieties and pressures which constant resource deficits cause to the Agency and Palestine refugee community – the obstacles and risks in this regard are considerable. We must examine the background history and processes at the UN to understand and avert those risks.

2. Risks to pursuing UN budgetary funding for UNRWA operations in their entirety

At a time when some are agitating “to review” UNRWA’s mandate and pushing for “reforms”, we have to be conscious and strategic as to how we expend our limited political capital in the current difficult geopolitical landscape, resolute in our aim to uphold and extend the mandate until the achievement of a just solution, and not over-reaching in a manner that could undermine it. So, while efforts to secure full funding of UNRWA from the UN regular budget are well-intentioned, the risks are many and we need to avoid them. The focus must be on increasing the assessed contribution, while maintaining strong backing for UNRWA’s mandate and for Palestine refugee rights.

3. 2017 initiative to increase the UN assessed contribution to UNRWA for essential operating costs

The reality is that we are barely able to achieve minimal increases of the assessed contribution from the UN regular budget to UNRWA. Even in 2017, when we sought to increase that assessed contribution, based on the broad consultations requested by the General Assembly and the March 2017 report of the UN Secretary-General proposing various means to ensure more predictable, sufficient and sustained funding, Member States were only ready to support a limited increase for what could be deemed recurrent “essential operating costs” and only in combination with assurances of the pursuit of other initiatives, such as the OIC waqf for Palestine refugees and more diversified resource mobilization by UNRWA, including with the World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, foundations, and other public and private partnerships, as reflected in the draft resolution I have shared (L.79) and in the memoranda we issued as part of our advocacy efforts at the time.

4. Engaging international responsibility and ensuring both financial and political support for UNRWA and solidarity with the Palestine refugees and support for realization of their rights

In light of the realities, we continue our efforts to activate international responsibility with funding support to address Palestine refugee humanitarian, developmental and protection needs through UNRWA, but also to ensure broadest political support for Palestine refugee rights and UNRWA’s mandate. The element of solidarity that is at the heart of these efforts and that continues to generate international support – though unfortunately less in these times of economic uncertainty and vast need across the globe – would be lost were UNRWA to be included simply as a line item in the UN budget, subject to intense negotiations and deletion at any moment in the bargaining among States.

5. Necessity of Palestinian partnership – diplomatic and civil society – in support of the Palestine refugees and UNRWA’s mandate until the achievement of a just solution

Together is the only way we can foster solidarity and preserve and, strengthen if possible, the political and financial support needed to ensure continuity of UNRWA’s mandate to assist the Palestine refugees until achievement of a just solution. And we are all in agreement that without an end to this grave and historic injustice, there can be no just solution and no peace and stability in our region. We know this, but it is also becoming clearer to the countries and peoples of the world in these days as we witness growing awareness of the abhorrent realities of Israel’s oppression of the Palestinian people and its illegal, colonial, apartheid occupation, growing solidarity with the Palestinian people and growing demands for justice for Palestine. We must work hand in hand to continue our progress and foster the resilience of our people until freedom and justice are realized and they are able to enjoy a life in dignity, safety and peace in their homeland, which they have been too long denied.