

October 4, 2016

The Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau, PC, MP
Minister for International Development and La Francophonie
House of Commons
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Dear Minister Bibeau,

We write to you as churches and church-related organizations deeply concerned for the plight of Palestinian refugees.

It is very timely that your office is considering the possible restoration of Canada's contribution to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), a contribution which was terminated in 2009 under the previous government.

We strongly urge Canada to restore its annual contribution in support of UNRWA's work, and to increase its contribution significantly. Some Canadian churches have worked with Palestinian partners for more than six decades. The Palestinian partners with whom we work and who provide humanitarian services to Palestinian refugees tell us that UNRWA's work in the provision of medical and educational services in the refugee camps is essential.

UNRWA's current financial situation is critical. It is faced with an increased demand for services from over five million registered Palestinian refugees, who struggle every day with greater vulnerability and deepening poverty throughout the Middle East. The growing level of need far outpaces the financial support, most of which is through voluntary donations. In Syria, 95% of the 450,000 Palestinians who remain trapped by the conflict need UNRWA's support to survive. There have been drastic cuts to UNRWA schools, hospitals and food assistance programs in Lebanon and Jordan. Palestinian refugees from Syria are bearing the brunt of these cuts. In Gaza, where 42 per cent of the population is under the age of 15, UNRWA schools help sustain the hopes of Gaza's youth that their future has possibilities, and lessen the risk of their being drawn into extremist causes. This hope is essential for the psychological well-being of individuals and the society.

The healthcare, education and vocational training UNRWA provides is crucial for the well-being of women in Palestinian society. As the primary caregivers, the women are responsible for ensuring the basic needs of their families are met. Responding to Gaza's humanitarian crisis falls particularly heavily on its women. There is a complex interplay of growing societal, economic and political pressures in Gaza. UNRWA provides much-needed empowerment and psychosocial programs for women.

The budget needed to provide core essential services is operating under a shortfall and is projected at US\$ 96.5 million for 2016. The cumulative shortfall of Canada's contribution alone is around \$132 million. Canada's support can make a tremendous difference in the everyday lives of Palestinians.

The Gospel commands us to feed the hungry, welcome strangers, take care of the sick and visit the imprisoned. As representatives of Churches and church-related organizations in Canada, we urge your government to act quickly and decisively to restore Canada's urgently needed contribution to UNRWA. We pray for your leadership in Canada's efforts toward a more just, peaceful and equitable world for all.

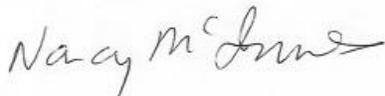
Sincerely,



The Most Reverend Fred Hiltz
Archbishop and Primate, The Anglican Church of Canada



The Most Rev. Douglas Crosby, OMI
Bishop of Hamilton and President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops



Nancy McInnes
Presiding Clerk, Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)



The Rev. Susan C. Johnson
National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada



Donald G. Peters
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Ian Ross-McDonald

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