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The EU releases further assistance to support Palestinian people and refugees

The European Union has today adopted the second part of its 2013 assistance package for Palestine. It will ensure that critical support to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for the provision of vital services in the area of health, education and social services to the Palestinian people is not interrupted.

The total value of the assistance package is €148 million. This funding comes from the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument and is the second part of the Annual Action Programme (AAP) 2013 for Palestine. The first part of AAP 2013 consisted of €100 million and had already been brought forward to the beginning of the year in order to respond to the pressing needs of the Palestinian people.

High Representative/Vice-President Catherine Ashton said: *“The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Brussels on 19 March confirmed that addressing the fiscal crisis of the Palestinian Authority requires concerted action by the PA, Israel and the donor community. With this contribution the European Union delivers on its promise to sustain the PA's viability and its ability to ensure essential services for the Palestinian people without interruption. We will continue to support the Palestinian people, including through UNRWA, and urge other donors to do the same.”*

EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle, commented: *“Despite commendable efforts of budget consolidation, the fiscal problem of the Palestinian Authority is progressively worsening and has been extremely difficult since the end of last year. The EU is aware of these constraints and taking steps to alleviate the problem. These new funds are vital for ensuring that there is no interruption in the provision of basic services, such as health, education, social protection, as well as in the relief to the Palestinian people in Palestine and to the Palestinian refugees abroad.”*

P R E S S

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The adopted assistance package has two components: firstly, €108 million will be allocated to the PEGASE mechanism (an instrument to channel EU and international assistance as a contribution to the building of the Palestinian State), which supports the Palestinian National Development Plan by helping the PA to finance its budget deficit and implement its reform agenda; meet its obligations towards civil employees, pensioners and most vulnerable citizens, and maintain the functioning of the administration and the provision of essential public services to the population.

It further allocates a second tranche of €40 million to UNRWA's 2013 regular budget (General Fund) in order to support the education, health, relief and social services programmes which UNRWA is responsible for providing for Palestine refugees in West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Background

Since its establishment in early 2008, the PEGASE mechanism has sustained the efforts of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan first and from 2011 in the National Development Plan covering the period 2011-2013 - to which the EU has expressed continuing support. The document reiterates the PA's commitment to the effective protection and promotion of the fundamental values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The PA remains committed to budgetary and fiscal transparency, with the systematic publication of the budget law. The objective of this action is to support the Palestinian National Development Plan by helping the PA to: finance its budget deficit and implement its reform agenda; meet its obligations towards civil employees, pensioners and poorest citizens, and maintain the functioning of the administration and the provision of essential public services to the population

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established in December 1949. Its mission then was to provide humanitarian relief for the refugees and displaced persons forced to flee their homes in Palestine during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Today, the Agency is the largest UN operation in the Middle East, with over 30,000 employees, almost all of them refugees themselves.

UNRWA is unique because it has maintained this commitment to just one group of people, spanning four generations. Today, UNRWA provides assistance to nearly 5 million Palestinian refugees in the West Bank & Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

UNRWA's assistance goes far beyond basic material support. By enabling refugee families and their children to attend school, to receive medical attention and to survive economically, UNRWA keeps alive the values of humanity, solidarity and dignity. In its Medium Term Strategy (2010-2015), UNRWA reaffirmed its willingness to continue this good work into the future.

For more information

- Website of the DG for Development and Cooperation DG-Europe Aid:

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm

- Website of the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/fule/

- On assistance to the Neighbourhood countries:

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/index_en.htm

- On the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP):

http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/index_en.htm

- EU-Palestine

http://eeas.europa.eu/occupied_palestinian_territory/index_en.htmText.