

## Concept Note

### Background & Context

As the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) enters its 76th year, it stands at a historic and perilous juncture. The Agency continues to be a lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees across the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria — offering education, healthcare, emergency assistance, and protection under a mandate established by UN General Assembly Resolution 302 (1949) — but, despite the reaffirmation of this mandate until June 2026, now faces unprecedented operational, financial and political threats.

In October 2024, Israel passed two laws seeking to severely hinder UNRWA's activities in the OPT, including East Jerusalem. These acts represent a blatant violation of international humanitarian law, a violation of the UN Charter, and a direct threat to multilateralism. In addition, the war in Gaza has resulted, as of August 2025, in over 300 UNRWA facilities destroyed and at least 360 UNRWA workers killed. Despite these challenges, the Agency continues to provide food, shelter, healthcare, and education to millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

These developments are part of a broader strategy to eliminate the issue of Palestine refugees from the international agenda, obstructing prospects for a just and lasting solution to their plight - in accordance with international law and the relevant UN resolutions - and undermining their rights.

At the same time, 2025 presents critical opportunities to reinforce and reform UNRWA's role:

- The renewal of UNRWA's mandate, scheduled to be voted during the General Assembly's opening months in late 2025, will provide a critical political signal about the international community's commitment to a just and lasting solution for Palestine refugees.
- The discussions on a political solution in the OPT, in line with the Two-State Solution, recognize UNRWA's invaluable role in any future political process, and therefore the need to shield UNRWA, in any transition, to avoid a sudden suspension of services. The independent state of Palestine will ultimately have to gradually assume UNRWA's functions when conditions allow and a just solution to the plight of the Palestinian refugees is achieved according to the international law and relevant UN resolutions.
- The importance of UNRWA was further underscored in the New York Declaration adopted by the High-Level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and on the Implementation of the Two-State Solution held in New York in July 2025. Participants reaffirmed UNRWA's indispensable role in sustaining humanitarian operations and service delivery during and after the war in Gaza and pledged continued political and financial support with the aim of safeguarding the Agency's functions as an essential pillar of peacebuilding and statehood readiness.
- In parallel, UNRWA has made major progress in implementing the recommendations of the 2024 Independent Review led by Catherine Colonna. 20 recommendations have already been completed; the remaining 30 are all in progress.

## Objectives

The meeting aims to reaffirm the international community's strong political support for UNRWA's mandate, and to recognize its irreplaceable and indispensable role in promoting regional stability, human development, and the protection of the rights of Palestine refugees. At a time of growing political, legal, and operational threats to the Agency, participants will be invited to underscore the enduring relevance of UNRWA's mandate, as established in General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) and reaffirmed in subsequent resolutions, as well as underline that the rights of Palestine Refugees must be protected.

In light of the catastrophic humanitarian toll of the war in Gaza, and the flagrant violations of international law, the conference will serve as a forum to emphasize the pressing need to safeguard respect for international humanitarian law, which clearly prohibits targeting civilians, humanitarian personnel, and using starvation as a method of warfare.

The meeting will also address the Agency's acute and ongoing financial crisis. UNRWA's worsening financial situation threatens the continuity of its core services and emergency assistance. Member States will be encouraged to consider tangible solutions to strengthen the Agency's financial sustainability, including pledging frameworks, the role of the international financial institutions, expansion of the donor base, and the consideration of assessed contributions, as first explored in General Assembly Resolution 71/93 (2016). In this regard, the meeting will provide an important opportunity to emphasize that addressing the protracted financial crisis of UNRWA should not, in any way, put additional burden on host countries or shift the responsibilities of UNRWA, according to its mandate, to the governments of those countries.

Participants will acknowledge the significant progress made by UNRWA in implementing ambitious reforms, particularly the recommendations of the 2024 independent review led by Catherine Colonna. The meeting will highlight the Agency's transparency and accountability in responding to the review. Member States will be encouraged to continue supporting the implementation of the recommendations, including through adequate financial and technical assistance.

In addition, the meeting will emphasize the importance of protecting UNRWA personnel, premises, and operations, in accordance with international humanitarian law, the UN Charter, and Security Council Resolution 2730 (2023). Attacks on UN staff and facilities, particularly in the context of the ongoing crisis in Gaza, must be condemned, and Member States must reaffirm their obligation to uphold the inviolability of UN operations.

Finally, participants will be urged to prioritize the continuity of access to UNRWA's education and health services. With over half a million students and millions of healthcare consultations annually, the Agency's services are not only vital to the daily life of Palestine refugees, but also represent a long-term investment in peace, stability, human rights, and dignity across the region.

This meeting represents a critical opportunity for the international community to demonstrate its collective resolve in safeguarding UNRWA, its mandate, and the rights and well-being of millions of Palestine refugees who rely on its services. By standing united in support of the Agency, Member States will send a powerful message that the international community remains committed to a just and lasting solution for Palestine refugees, and to upholding the principles of international law, multilateralism, and human dignity.