Ministerial Meeting on the Margins of the 81st United Nations General Assembly

Safeguarding UNRWA: Protecting Humanitarian Action and Upholding its General Assembly Mandate

Co-hosted by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Kingdom of Spain and the Federative Republic of Brazil

New York, 24th September 2026

CONCEPT NOTE

Background and Context

As the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) enters its seventy-seventh year of existence, it continues to carry out the mandate entrusted to it by the United Nations General Assembly through resolution 302 (IV) and subsequent resolutions. For nearly six million Palestine refugees across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, the Agency provides education, health care, relief, protection and emergency assistance in accordance with that mandate.

Since its establishment in 1949, the international community has reaffirmed its commitment to UNRWA through the successful renewal of the Agency's mandate by the United Nations General Assembly, most recently in 2025. The renewed mandate reflects the continued recognition by Member States that UNRWA remains indispensable pending a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine refugees in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions. This can only be grounded on the implementation of the two-State solution, where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace and security, on 4 June 1967 lines as per relevant United Nations resolutions.

At the same time, the operating environment has become increasingly complex. Despite the ceasefire agreement in October 2025, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains catastrophic, with widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, massive humanitarian needs and persistent challenges affecting the safe, sustained and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale. Across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, UNRWA continues to face significant political, legal and operational constraints affecting its ability to discharge the responsibilities entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

The Agency's personnel, premises and operations have continued to come under unprecedented pressure, including attacks that have caused the death of more than 390 UNRWA staff members in Gaza and actions against its presence in occupied East Jerusalem, including the demolition of structures within its headquarters compound. These circumstances underscore the urgent need to strengthen respect for international law, including international humanitarian law, and to ensure the protection of United Nations personnel, premises and humanitarian operations, as reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion of 22 October 2025.

In Gaza, UNRWA remains the only United Nations agency with the mandate, operational capacity, infrastructure and community presence necessary to deliver essential services and large-scale humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees across the Strip. Across all five fields of operation, safeguarding its operational capacity is essential to ensuring the effective and uninterrupted implementation of the mandate conferred upon it by the General Assembly. The Agency must be able

to fully operate and cooperate with other humanitarian entities in the next phases of stabilization in Gaza.

Relevant General Assembly resolutions have reaffirmed the responsibility of the international community to enable UNRWA to continue carrying out the functions assigned to it. The Agency should remain fully enabled, within its mandate, to maintain its services and operations in Gaza and across all fields of operation.

UNRWA is also advancing a comprehensive reform agenda. Building on the recommendations of the Independent Review led by Catherine Colonna, the Agency is strengthening neutrality, governance, oversight, accountability and transparency, while modernizing service delivery, improving efficiency and adapting its programmes to the evolving needs of Palestine refugees. These reforms should support resilience and expand opportunities without prejudice to the status and rights of Palestine refugees or to UNRWA's mandate.

Despite these efforts, UNRWA's financial situation remains critically fragile. Persistent funding shortfalls continue to threaten the continuity of essential services, including education, health care, social protection and emergency assistance. Ensuring predictable, adequate, diversified and sustainable financing is therefore essential to enabling the Agency to carry out the mandate entrusted to it. Sustainable financing and reform should not result in the transfer of UNRWA's responsibilities or additional burdens to host countries.

Against this backdrop, the Ministerial Meeting provides an opportunity for Member States to reaffirm their collective commitment to the United Nations Charter, international law, international humanitarian law and the mandate conferred upon UNRWA by the General Assembly, while translating political support into practical measures that enable the Agency to continue fulfilling that mandate.

Guiding Principles

- Reaffirming the mandate entrusted to UNRWA by the United Nations General Assembly and preserving the Agency's ability to discharge that mandate effectively.
- Safeguarding the dignity, rights and well-being of Palestine refugees pending a just and lasting solution to their plight in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, grounded on the implementation of the two-State solution.
- Upholding international law, including international humanitarian law, and reinforcing the protection afforded to United Nations personnel, premises and humanitarian operations.
- Preserving humanitarian space and ensuring the continuity of life-saving assistance and essential services for Palestine refugees.
- Upholding a strengthened multilateral system based on the United Nations Charter and supporting the effective implementation of United Nations mandates.
- Promoting sustainable burden-sharing through predictable, diversified and adequate international financial support.

Objectives

The Ministerial Meeting seeks to consolidate international political and financial support for UNRWA and to reaffirm the Agency's role in carrying out the mandate entrusted to it by the United Nations General Assembly.

- Reaffirm Member States' collective commitment to safeguarding UNRWA's mandate and preserving its ability to implement the responsibilities entrusted to it by the General Assembly.
- Mobilize political support to preserve UNRWA's operational capacity and ensure the uninterrupted delivery of education, health care, relief, protection and emergency assistance across all fields of operation.

- Promote respect for international law, including international humanitarian law, and strengthen support for the protection of United Nations personnel, premises and humanitarian operations.
- Address the Agency's financial sustainability by encouraging predictable, multi-year and diversified funding, broadening the donor base and exploring innovative financing mechanisms consistent with General Assembly resolutions.
- Recognize the progress achieved in implementing institutional reforms and encourage continued efforts to strengthen governance, transparency, accountability, neutrality and operational effectiveness.
- Reaffirm the importance of maintaining essential services for Palestine refugees in accordance with the mandate entrusted to the Agency.
- Ensure that UNRWA remains fully enabled, within its mandate, to maintain its services and operations in Gaza and across all fields of operation.

Expected Outcomes

- A strong reaffirmation of Member States' commitment to safeguarding UNRWA's mandate and ensuring the Agency's continued ability to fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to it by the General Assembly.
- Renewed political support for preserving the operational space necessary for UNRWA to continue delivering humanitarian assistance and essential services to Palestine refugees in Gaza and across all fields of operation.
- Concrete financial commitments aimed at strengthening the Agency's immediate and long-term financial sustainability through broader burden-sharing, expanded donor participation and more predictable financing arrangements.
- Recognition of the progress achieved by UNRWA in implementing institutional reforms, accompanied by continued support for strengthening governance, accountability, transparency, neutrality and operational effectiveness.
- A renewed commitment to respect and protect United Nations personnel, premises and humanitarian operations in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law.
- Support for UNRWA's continued implementation of its mandate in Gaza in the post-conflict and reconstruction phase, and across all fields of operation.
- Agreement to strengthen coordination among interested Member States and international partners in support of sustained political engagement and predictable financial support for the Agency.
- A clear message that the international community remains committed to enabling UNRWA to carry out the mandate entrusted to it pending a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine refugees in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions.