

**Remarks by H.E. Ms. Sylvie Lucas,
Permanent Representative of Luxembourg to the United Nations
at the opening ceremony of the photo exhibition “UNRWA@60”
New York, 30 November 2009**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today at the opening of this photo exhibit commemorating 60 years of activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNRWA. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which we observe officially today, is, I believe, a particularly well chosen date for this occasion.

On behalf of my Government, I would like to pay tribute to UNRWA's relentless efforts to relieve the plight of the Palestinian refugees. Especially in difficult times, UNRWA and its staff are often the first and the last ones on the ground, and we commend their courage and their commitment in the daily exercise of their work, oftentimes at the risk of their life. Over its 60 years of service, UNRWA has enormously contributed to improving the living conditions of millions of Palestinian refugees, assisting them in their daily struggle for a life in dignity. Unfortunately, UNRWA regularly has to operate under enormous constraints, and we deeply deplore the fact that UNRWA's ability to fulfill its mandate is all too often hampered as we have seen again this year in Gaza. Humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons should immediately and unconditionally be allowed to cross into and from Gaza, to allow UNRWA to address the immediate humanitarian needs of the people in Gaza, and to allow the reconstruction and recovery process to go forward.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

My country has a long-standing relation with UNRWA. As the principal provider of basic social services for Palestinian refugees UNRWA is the main partner for Luxembourg's development cooperation in this part of the world, and Luxembourg's voluntary contributions, over the years, to the core budget of UNRWA, and our cooperation with UNRWA especially in the areas of education, health and microfinance are a testimony of our appreciation of the Agency's work. Today, Luxembourg's contribution to UNRWA ranks 19th, in absolute terms, among international donors, and we are determined, also in these times of economic crisis, to maintain our commitment towards the Agency and the Palestinian refugees. It was therefore only natural for my country to respond positively to the request to support the commemoration of UNRWA's 60th anniversary, first in September and now with this photo exhibit and tonight's concert.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing my brief remarks, and without wanting to tarnish the celebratory spirit of today's ceremony, allow me to quote my Deputy Prime Minister, who in his speech before the General Assembly this year, said "UNRWA's 60th anniversary is, in a way, an anniversary that we would have preferred not to have to commemorate: while it allows us to express our gratitude for the outstanding work done by the Agency at the service of the Palestinian people on a daily basis, it is also synonymous with failure. Indeed, 60 years later, the situation in the Middle East remains unresolved."

At the eve of UNRWA's 60th anniversary on 8 December, it is more urgent than ever to renew the peace process. Luxembourg reconfirms its steadfast commitment to continue to support the Palestinian people, and to help, together with its EU partners, to seek a solution based on the coexistence of two States and a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Thank you very much.