



United Nations Security Council

“The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (UNRWA)

New York, 17 April 2024

Statement by H.E. Mr. Olivier Maes

Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Luxembourg

**on behalf of a group of countries (Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Norway, Portugal,
Slovenia, Spain, and Luxembourg)**

1. Madam President, I thank you for convening this briefing of the Security Council.
2. I would also like to thank Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini for his briefing, and to express our full confidence in his leadership of UNRWA at this challenging time.
3. I have the honour to speak on behalf of Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and my own country, Luxembourg.
4. We remain firmly committed to UNRWA’s work. This commitment stems from our recognition of its vital activities in the past 75 years and its unique role in assisting Palestinians in Gaza, in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.
5. Today’s meeting is an important opportunity to recall the critical contribution that UNRWA makes to international peace and security, and to formulate strategies to address the obstacles preventing UNRWA from conducting its humanitarian and human development operations in an effective manner.
6. The General Assembly last renewed the vital mandate of UNRWA in December 2022, affirming the necessity of the continuation of UNRWA’s work. We stand in strong support of that mandate, which remains as essential as ever.
7. At this time more than ever we are conscious of UNRWA’s work to alleviate the suffering of Palestine refugees, for whom the Agency is a lifeline. The Agency contributes to the protection of Palestine refugees both through service delivery and by advocating their rights with relevant stakeholders.

8. We are extremely concerned at any efforts to question UNRWA's role and hamper its work. UNRWA remains the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza. UNRWA is absolutely essential to ensure that the resolutions that this Council adopted to massively scale up humanitarian aid to and within Gaza (resolutions 2712, 2720, 2728) can be implemented.
9. Furthermore, UNRWA is a pillar of regional stability and a beacon of hope for millions of Palestinian children, women and men. It must be maintained and deserves our continued collective support until there is a political solution.
10. We once again acknowledge that many of UNRWA's staff have paid the ultimate price while carrying out its lifesaving work. We pay tribute to all the lives that have been lost and we offer our sincere condolences to their families.
11. Humanitarian workers, including UNRWA staff and those who supply them with aid, are providing lifesaving assistance under intolerable conditions. These workers must be protected, in full accordance with international humanitarian law.
12. UNRWA, as well as the other humanitarian actors, needs full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access at scale into and throughout Gaza and the West Bank. It is essential that Israeli restrictions and arbitrary impediments impacting the work of UNRWA and other humanitarian groups are immediately lifted to ensure the desperately needed flow of aid.
13. Madam President, we fully support and trust the UN Secretary-General and Commissioner-General's swift responses to the grave allegations made about 12 members of UNRWA's staff, out of approximately 13,000 working in Gaza, including the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the independent review processes.
14. We look forward to the final outcome of these important processes, due shortly, and reiterate our call on all parties to fully cooperate with these processes. We are confident that where and as necessary the independent review can further strengthen UNRWA's transparency and accountability.
15. The fighting across Gaza must stop immediately. It is imperative that Israel, and other actors, refrain from further escalation. We need an immediate ceasefire and the full, safe and unhindered access of humanitarian aid.
16. In that regard, we call for the immediate implementation of resolutions 2712, 2720 and 2728. We also call for the immediate implementation of the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice on 26 January and 28 March.

17. Madam President, we wish to reiterate our condemnation of the brutal attacks by Hamas on 7th October and our continued calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.
18. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is on an unprecedented and inhumane scale. Over 33,000 people, mostly women and children, have now been killed and so many lives hang in the balance.
19. People are in dire need of the most basic lifesaving provisions – food, safe drinking water, sanitation, shelter, medicine and medical supplies. People have been pushed beyond all human limits.
20. More than 85% of the population has been forced from their homes and further displaced on multiple occasions. A conflict-induced famine looms large, with 1.1 million people now facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity.
21. Madam President, UNRWA's financial situation remains deeply concerning, given the continued suspension of some of UNRWA's largest donors. At a time of a humanitarian catastrophe of epic proportions in Gaza, UNRWA – as the Agency with the largest footprint and expertise by far – needs predictable and sustainable financing.
22. Continued suspension will cost lives and will put UNRWA's role in regional stability in jeopardy. That is why we reinforced our support for UNRWA. We, as a group of countries, have provided \$100 million to UNRWA in 2024 so far. We call on existing donors and possible new donors to consider stepping up their support to UNRWA.
23. We commend the European Commission for the swift allocation of €50 million to the Agency. We expect that further funds planned for this year will be contributed without unnecessary delay.
24. Madam President, we close by reiterating our firm conviction that the only solution to this crisis remains the implementation of the two-State solution. We therefore support all efforts, including in the Security Council, to restore a political horizon, leading to a political process under the auspices of the United Nations.
25. Thank you.