

Delegation from
The Student World Assembly (NGO)

Represented by
LaGuardia Community College

Position Paper for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

The issues before the UNRWA are: the Impact of the Separation Wall, the Assessment of UNRWA Refugee Programmes, and Strengthening of the Microfinance and Microenterprise Programme. The SWA affirms its support of the UNRWA and its endeavors to aid Palestine refugees. Its dedication to this is shown through its efforts to educate its student-members globally through its website and online discussion board on the Palestine-Israel conflict and urge for a permanent political solution. The SWA slogan is “Educate, Participate, Take Action.” Through education and peaceful action, the SWA supports efforts by other similar NGOs to highlight the plight of the Palestine refugees. The SWA is a proponent of any Humanitarian effort to aid misplaced populations due to conflict or natural disasters and has been actively involved in providing forums that deal with awareness and action to collect and distribute funds.

I. The Impact of the Separation Wall

Deeply concerned about the building of the Separation Wall and the detrimental effects of its construction on the Palestinian land and population, the SWA—while cognizant of Israel’s security concerns—believes that this issue is an alarming one that should be dealt as a top priority by the United Nations. The Wall poses a threat to Palestinians’ survival and hampers the efforts of international aid and relief organizations to assist the thousands of Palestinians refugees. The 2004 UN Report on the West Bank Barrier provides a clear indication that the barrier construction should be halted until the international community has a chance to consider its legal ramifications and its impact on the Palestinian people as well as the peace process.

A number of UN reports and other articles have documented the restriction of movement imposed on the Palestinian population due to the Wall. The SWA emphasizes the importance of the right of all people to freedom of movement and dignified existence. The SWA strongly believes that Israel should honor the ruling of the International Court of Justice, requested by the UN General Assembly, that the Wall as constructed is illegal. Until such an action is taken by Israel, the SWA feels that the international community must secure a commitment from Israel Government that movement of international relief organizations operating in the West Bank area, and wherever the construction of Wall has been progressed, will be assisted and allowed with the least possible difficulty in order to provide aid to the Palestinian people, and particularly the refugees.

II. Assessment of UNWRA Refugee Programmes

UNRWA was established following the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict by the UN General Assembly with a mandate to carry out direct relief and works programs for Palestine refugees in Gaza/the West Bank and in the neighboring countries (Jordan, Lebanon and Syria), in close cooperation with the governments of the host countries. It was the expectation in 1949 that UNRWA would only exist for a short period. In the absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee problem after more than 50 years, however, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate, most recently extending it until 30 June 2005. UNRWA thus differs from most other UN agencies by its temporary nature and its focus on one specific community. In the present critical situation in the Gaza and the West Bank, UNRWA has seen a vast extension of its

responsibilities. UNRWA is currently the leading agency dealing with the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza and the West Bank. This work is carried out under very difficult circumstances, as numerous obstacles pertaining to the current level of strife and threats in the Occupied Territories impede the access and working conditions of UNRWA staff.

Until a just and permanent solution has been agreed, UNRWA remains the main provider of basic services to over 4 million Palestine refugees in the Middle East. The SWA strongly supports these operations of more than 900 facilities that provide education, health, relief and social services, as well as a micro-finance and enterprise programmes. The SWA supports UNRWA's repeated protestations to the Israeli military to stop indiscriminate firing into civilian areas in the occupied Palestinian territory which have caused death of many innocent children. The SWA has participated in demonstrations in front of the UN to bring attention to the continuing danger innocent children are exposed to by the realities of the occupation and the Palestine-Israel conflict. The plight and fair treatment of the Palestinian refugees in the host countries of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan is of concern to the SWA as well.

While clearly understanding and respecting Israel's security concerns, The SWA considers it vital that UNRWA is unhindered by the Israeli authorities to carry out its mandate. Israel, as the occupying power, must respect its obligation under international humanitarian law (Fourth Geneva Convention) and accordingly grant UNRWA the freedom of access, mobility and protection which it is entitled to. The Student World Assembly emphasizes the importance of UNRWA's continued role, and its continued hiring of the Palestinian personnel, until the issue of refugees is comprehensively and equitably resolved.

III. Strengthening Microfinance and Microenterprise

Empowerment of peoples with limited funds to sustain a dignified existence and provide a venue for solutions that envision an exodus from perpetual poverty and degradation is one of the underlined principles of the SWA. Microfinance and Microenterprise are potentially successful projects that prioritize assistance to the poorest and disadvantaged population who are primarily comprised of refugees and women. The SWA has been an active advocate of such endeavors by educating its members on a global scale while encouraging dynamics that allow implementation of Microfinance and Microenterprise on a local level. In accordance with the spirit of the UN launch of 2005 as the International year of Microcredit, the SWA has also launched a campaign designed to raise public awareness about Microcredit and Social entrepreneurship by hosting a lecture in February 2005 by the award-winning author, David Bornstein, who has written extensively on the subjects. Mr. Bornstein reported the hopeful progress of microfinance throughout the world.

While the SWA clearly understands the unique complexities of Microfinance and Microenterprise for UNRWA, it feels strongly that it should be promoted in the refugees communities until a permanent settlement is achieved. Finally, the SWA supports the UN General Assembly designation of the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) as the focal points to coordinate the activities of the United Nations system for the International Year of Microcredit 2005.