

**UNRWA Submission to Reports mandated by Human Rights Council:
“Promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms through a better understanding of
traditional values of human kind: best practices”**

Reference is made to the request for information for reports to be submitted with regard to Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/AC/9/6, entitled “Promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms through a better understanding of traditional values of human kind: best practices”.

In response to the request for information, dated 7 February 2013, UNRWA, which has devised and put significant work into defining an approach to human rights education that addresses and incorporates traditional values, is pleased to provide the below information. Given the request for concise input, only a cursory overview can be provided of the Agency framework and activities with regard to the subject matter of the report. Additional background information on the human rights and protection mandate of the Agency and general information on the Agency are included in Annex 1 and Annex 2 respectively.

The Human Rights Council, in HRC res. 16/3, adopted on 24 March 2011, noted *inter alia* that traditional values – dignity, freedom and responsibility – can be practically applied in the promotion and protection of human rights, particularly through the process of human rights education (para 4).

UNRWA is the main provider of primary education in its five fields of operations, with 691 elementary and preparatory schools providing free basic education for nearly half a million Palestine refugee children. The Agency’s education programme’s vision is to develop “the full potential of Palestine Refugees to enable them to be confident, innovative, questioning, thoughtful, tolerant and open-minded, upholding human values and religious tolerance, proud of their Palestinian identity and contributing positively to the development of their society and the global community” (UNRWA Education Reform Strategy 2011 – 2015, par. 1.2, p. 1).

In June 2012, the Agency adopted its policy on Education for Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance (HRCRT), situated within the frameworks of both the Agency’s Medium Term Strategy 2010 – 2015 and its Education Reform Strategy 2011 – 2015, and more broadly, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education For All (EFA) initiative. The policy reflects the UN Charter and international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the World Programme for Human Rights Education, and the recently adopted UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, all of which promote human rights education. In line with the General Assembly’s encouragement to “continue making progress in addressing the needs and rights of children [...] in its operations in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child” (see Annex 1), the policy also draws heavily on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

A key feature of the HRCRT policy and implementation activities envisaged therein is the recognition of the importance of a child’s cultural identity, language and values, and the national values of the country in which the child is living or from which he or she originates in accordance with Article 29, para. 1(a) of the CRC. That provision has been instrumental in demystifying human rights and tackling an often voiced prejudice among the community that educating children on human rights would serve to challenge the Palestinian values and identity of Palestine refugee children. Through the reference to the CRC, it was possible to demonstrate how human rights education and education on traditional values and related issues was in fact complementary, rather than mutually exclusive.

The HRCRT policy is founded on a common set of human rights principles particularly relevant to Palestine refugees: human dignity; universality; equality and non-discrimination; participation and inclusion; and tolerance. Its strategic objectives are buttressed in these principles, with the aim to (i) build on the human rights principles embedded within the cultural context of Palestine refugees; (ii) develop a human rights education environment in UNRWA education facilities that is conducive to promoting a culture of human rights; and (iii) equip UNRWA students and youths with human rights knowledge and skills in an attempt to positively influence their attitudes and behaviour in order to contribute positively to their society and the global community.

The implementation of the HRCRT policy builds upon the Agency's existing HRCRT programme, first developed in 1999 in Gaza, but since expanded and implemented in all five fields of the Agency's operations. UNRWA follows host country curriculum which it enriches as appropriate. It has also developed specific human rights education materials to be taught either as an independent subject, or to be integrated into other subjects using 'enrichment materials' to incorporate human rights into subjects such as Arabic language, social studies, religious education, and English language, with storybooks and activities assisting teachers to convey human rights values throughout lessons.

In order to further facilitate the implementation of the HRCRT policy, the Agency is in the process of developing and rolling out a HRCRT Teacher's Toolkit, to provide teachers from all grades with the tools needed to teach human rights in the classroom. The HRCRT Toolkit presents seven central themes that were identified by UNRWA staff as being fundamental to the development of Palestine refugee students, including general human rights; participation; diversity; equality and non-discrimination; respect; conflict resolution and community links. The Toolkit has to date been tested in the West Bank and Gaza, and is currently being reviewed to incorporate lessons learned from the pre-testing. The Toolkit will be finalised in first week of April 2013, and it is anticipated trainings will commence in June-July in all five fields of the Agency's operations.

The learner competencies of the policy, and the teacher's mandate for implementation of the policy, build on the policy's strategic objectives. Learner competencies require that the learner is specifically aware of, knows about, and understands current or historical events in one's own country, continent or in the world that illustrate major human rights issues, violations or movements, and that the learner can identify individuals or groups who contributed and still contribute to the upholding and defence of human rights. Furthermore, the programme acknowledges the importance for both teachers and students of their having pride in their Palestinian identity while respecting and valuing cultural diversity. In order to fully operationalise the HRCRT policy, the Agency is committed to integrating human rights education into all UNRWA education frameworks, training, and other policies, including the Teacher Education Policy and the Inclusive Education Policy, and to integrate the policy in the development of School-Based Teacher Development materials.

Annex 1:

Background: Human rights and Protection mandate of UNRWA

UNRWA was established as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly pursuant to General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 (for further information on UNRWA see Section 4 below) As a UN organ, in particular a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, the Agency's mandate ultimately derives from the UN Charter and resolutions adopted by the General Assembly as its parent organ. In the performance of its mandate, UNRWA – as any other UN organ – will be guided by relevant standards adopted by the United Nations, in particular those adopted by its parent organ. This applies, for example, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948 (GA res. 217 A (III)). Moreover, in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document, the General Assembly called upon “all parts of the United Nations to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with their mandate” (GA res. 60/1, adopted 16 September 2005, at para. 119). The human rights and fundamental freedoms to be promoted are enshrined in the international bill of rights, which comprises the UDHR, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The General Assembly has, furthermore, specifically instructed the Agency to deliver its services in accordance with relevant international human rights standards. In its resolution regarding UNRWA Operations (a key part of our mandate) the General Assembly specifically encourages UNRWA “in close cooperation with other relevant United Nations entities, to continue making progress in addressing the needs and rights of children, women and persons with disabilities in its operations in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, respectively” (GA res. 67/116, adopted 18 December 2012, at operative para. 13; the same language is contained in preceding resolutions regarding UNRWA Operations).

Related to the above points, UNRWA has a specific protection mandate, as recognized by the General Assembly (e.g. in GA resolution 67/116, adopted on 18 December 2012, which refers to the Agency's “essential role that it has played for over 60 years since its establishment in providing vital services for the well-being, human development and protection of the Palestine refugees and the amelioration of their plight”, operative paragraph 3). The protection mandate is reflected in the Agency's Medium Term Strategy for 2010 to 2015 and the fourth human development goal contained therein (“Human rights enjoyed to the fullest extent possible”). In one of the strategic objectives under Goal 4, the Agency committed to “ensure service delivery meets the protection needs of beneficiaries, including vulnerable groups” (SO12) and to “safeguard and advance the rights of Palestine refugees by promoting respect for human rights, international humanitarian law and international refugee law” (SO13).

The Agency's role in protection is an integral part of its mandate to meet refugee needs in education, health, relief and social services, microfinance and adequate living conditions, including shelter, as well as the rights set down in international legal instruments. Its work in this regard is pursued in cooperation with national authorities, other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations.

UNRWA protection work has internal and external dimensions. Internally, UNRWA promotes protection through programming and service delivery. Externally, it engages in the monitoring and reporting of refugee conditions and undertakes appropriate interventions, and the Commissioner-General highlights the need for a just and durable solution to the conflict, one that respects the right of the refugees.

The provision of essential services by UNRWA, and ensuring access to them under different circumstances, including conflict, is integral to the enjoyment of rights of the refugees. Direct and indirect engagement with other actors helps to create and consolidate an environment and practices in which rights are respected. Those rights include economic and social rights associated with the UNRWA core areas of service delivery, such as education, as well as civil and political rights, such as the right to life. In addition, as a major provider of public services, UNRWA seeks to ensure that the manner in which it provides them ensures respect for the rights, dignity and safety of its beneficiaries. It does this by, for example, mainstreaming minimum protection standards in all programmes across all fields of operation, acting to eliminate violence in schools, taking steps to prevent gender based violence and abuse of children and promoting knowledge of individual rights through long-term human rights and tolerance programming in its schools. Monitoring and reporting mechanisms help in the effective implementation of protection activities.

Based on the MTS and its understanding of protection, the Agency has developed specific protection standards that are an essential part of UNRWA's protection mainstreaming and guidance to assess progress towards mainstreaming protection in UNRWA programming and service delivery ("Tool for Incorporating Minimum Standards on Protection into UNRWA Programming and Service Delivery"). The tool has been used by each of the five UNRWA fields to conduct 'protection audits', producing quantitative baselines for measuring the degree of alignment with UNRWA standards for incorporating protection across all aspects of programming.

Annex 2:

Background - General information on UNRWA:

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of December 1949. The Agency is a subsidiary body of the Assembly and became operational on 1 May 1950, responding to the needs of about 750,000 Palestine refugees. It is one of the largest United Nations programmes, with a population of approximately 5 million registered Palestine refugees under its mandate and over 30,000 staff.

The Agency's mission is to assist Palestine refugees in achieving their full potential in human development until a durable and just solution is found to the refugee issue. The Agency fulfils its humanitarian and human development mandate by providing protection and essential services to Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Its services include basic (and in Lebanon, secondary) education, comprehensive primary health care, emergency relief, social interventions, microfinance, shelter and infrastructural support.

The education programme is the largest of the UNRWA programmes. Education staff comprises more than 70% of the total Agency staff and education expenditure accounts for 59% of the total regular budget. UNRWA is the main provider of basic education to Palestine refugees, with all Palestine refugees eligible to avail themselves of the Agency's nine to ten years of free basic education provided in the five Fields of operation, and in Lebanon, to secondary schooling.

Further information on UNRWA is available at <http://www.unrwa.org/>