

**Closing Remarks by Filippo Grandi,
Commissioner-General of UNRWA**

**10th DIHAD
Dubai, 27 March 2013**

**“Building Effective and Sustainable Partnerships in
Humanitarian Assistance and Development Activities”**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be delivering closing remarks to DIHAD on its 10th anniversary - being here for the fourth consecutive time I can claim to be one of the friends of this initiative, and as such wish to congratulate its organizers and participants. Thanks and appreciation are due first and foremost to His Royal Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who created and inspired this important event and promoted charitable and humanitarian work the world over.

My thanks also go to the sponsors: the UAE Red Crescent Authority, the International Humanitarian City, Dubai Cares, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. And last but not least let me express thanks and admiration to Her Royal Highness Princess Haya bint al-Hussein for her continued leadership and inspiration.

I speak for an organization whose evolution is a case in point for all that has been discussed in the last three days. UNRWA covers the range of subjects that have been examined here. It has had over six decades of experience in discovering the value of partnerships. Like many of you, we have accomplished much, but we have also made mistakes and learned lessons along the way. We have seen numerous organizational evolutions in what assistance we deliver and how we deliver it. We have undergone an extensive reform process to make us lean, efficient and

competitive in a world of ever-increasing costs and scarcer resources. We have also become better in cooperation and learning together with other United Nations organizations, especially in humanitarian emergencies, such as in and around Syria, where inter-agency cooperation is a life-saving priority. Catastrophic events, coupled with financial constraints, while extremely challenging, do have the benefit of making an organization like ours - and many others present here - look all around for friends, for burden-sharing, for lessons learned.

While our donors have always played a critical role, the practice of involving other parties closely in our work as partners has had a more recent evolution in UNRWA. States sometimes go through what is termed an “economic opening” , or *infitah*. UNRWA has gone through an organizational *infitah*, centered largely on partnerships, which has not only brought us wider expertise and dynamism, but also enhanced credibility and understanding of our work, while preserving and even strengthening the mandate which we have received from the international community through the United Nations General Assembly. This in turn has vastly improved our capacity to serve Palestine refugees, now numbering five million in the Near East.

Working in close collaboration with governments, foundations, businesses and national committees, we draw support and skills from a vast range of actors whose interests complement ours in some way. Much has been said about these alliances in the past few days, so I won't dwell too much on the subject. I would like to stress three points.

First, let me use UNRWA's example to refer to a partnership which is becoming increasingly crucial in today's complex humanitarian world: that with the communities that we serve.

UNRWA is well placed to speak about this partnership. Its unique *modus operandi* – delivering programmes directly through teachers, medical personnel and social workers – is bringing into increasingly sharp relief both the relevance and complexity of partnership with the Palestine refugee communities whom we serve throughout the Near East. Recent interaction with refugee youth, following a conference in Brussels last year, has highlighted the importance of dialogue with refugees, especially the young, who (for example) wish to have a greater say in the manner in which we design education, health and social programmes on their behalf. Of course, UNRWA has interacted with Palestine refugees since its inception, 63 years ago. However, the perception that political actors are unable to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and hence to the question of Palestine refugees - the type of failure which, in a different context, we see happening in Syria as well - and the impressive development of technology-based communication and of social media - have given a whole new dimension to our relationship with refugees in recent years; and, I believe, to the relationship of all organizations with the populations they serve.

In our case, to partner with refugees is not an easy challenge – and it is made more complicated by the highly politicised environment in which we operate: with whom do we interact? How do we ensure that those with whom we discuss these issues are representatives of the majority of five million registered Palestine refugees? How can we reconcile agendas that are sometimes in sharp contrast, and yet ensure that programme delivery continues without interruption, and in the most efficient manner? These are difficult, but stimulating questions, which will increasingly challenge all organizations working with communities affected or displaced by new and old conflicts, in a world in which civil society, and especially the young, occupy the void left by the

failures of politics and diplomacy with new and powerful ways through which they communicate, interact and express frustrations and hopes.

My second point refers to partnerships in this region, the Gulf region. Let me use UNRWA again as a vantage point, and emphasize upfront that we have made much progress in developing important alliances in this part of the world. I hope that the successes we have witnessed (and the lessons we have learned in the process) can be useful to other humanitarian actors as well. I wish to flag in particular the work we have done with three organizations: the Saudi Fund for Development, the Islamic Development Bank and the UAE Red Crescent Authority. The word “strategic” is overused but our alliance with these organizations has moved from a traditional donor relationship to a strategic partnership at different levels: they are partners to whom we can ask to respond in a real moment of need, such as in the frequent emergency situations; and at the same time we increasingly plan together, and in a very strategic way, for the long term, especially in supporting Palestine refugees living in the occupied territory, under the ever expanding obstacles created by the Israeli occupation, and especially the expansion of illegal settlements; and in promoting the essential task of rehabilitation and reconstruction, especially in blockaded Gaza.

But UNRWA’s strategic allies in the region are not confined to the governmental sector. We have steady, long-term partners in the shape of non-governmental organizations such as the Khalifa Bin Zayed Foundation and the Saudi Committee for the Support of the Palestinian People. Like in other parts of the world, but with the specificity linked to the millennial tradition of obligations to the poor and vulnerable which is a tenet of Islam, in the Gulf region one of the

growing aspects of aid-giving is that more and more of it is delivered not through governments but through the non-governmental sector. And within that sector, more is being donated from companies and individuals.

Our successes in becoming partners with organizations in the Gulf region have been achieved through intensive dialogue, the cultivation of mutual respect, and the recognition of respective roles and interests. This has taken time, patience and efforts on all sides, and it is still developing, I believe there is increasing understanding on the part of Gulf-based organizations of the importance of multilateral aid - of the guarantees that it can give of impartiality and effectiveness. This is crucial, as we work together, more and more, in situations full of complex political and security challenges, for example in Syria. Embracing international partnerships by players in the Gulf region must therefore be encouraged and promoted further, including by political leaders. On our side, as an old international organization, we have made efforts to appreciate the very specific dynamics of aid in this region, which follow approaches that are different, sometimes, from traditional, western-based agencies, but which are equally, and primarily, focused on relieving the suffering of individuals and communities in distress, with a strong focus on tangible contributions.

Differences in the concept and delivery of aid will continue to exist. I actually believe that they are healthy and stimulating. This said, partnerships between East and West, and also between North and South, if you allow me these expressions, are indispensable for the future of aid. The challenges continue to grow, and western donors cannot bear alone the cost of aid any longer. Scarcity of resources, global economic downturn, conflict and displacement, natural disasters

and increasingly even the weather, create the need for more humanitarian action and actors.

We have learned from our partners in this region that we are most effective when we speak directly to the core issues creating suffering, creating poverty, creating displacement. We are proud that our commitment to, and very concrete work in support of Palestine refugees - whose exile continues to remain unaddressed and unresolved - is increasingly recognized in this region as worthy of support, and hope that it will remain the foundation for many excellent partnerships, and a model for others to follow.

My third point refers to the Syria crisis, which - like for most of you - is our most urgent challenge today, as we strive to help half a million Palestine refugees stranded in the midst of terrible, murderous violence. Needless to say, the most urgent requirement is for the parties to the conflict, and international political actors, to agree to cease fire immediately and create conditions for a political solution. Millions in Syria are suffering in ways we cannot imagine, confronted by basic needs, gripped by fear - we see it ourselves every day, in our work with Palestine refugees who have become displaced and refugees a second time. Millions in Syria are watching, without understanding, the inability of the international community to find agreement in how to stop the fighting. And unless this is achieved - one is sorry to say - we will have to soon apportion the same heavy responsibilities which have haunted us after other similar, disastrous failures, as in Bosnia or Rwanda. Meanwhile, as has been discussed extensively in the past few days, the impact of the Syria war on people's lives has become so huge and catastrophic, that humanitarian organizations are already unable to cope alone with the challenges of displacement, health hazards, poverty and destruction. The Syria crisis belongs to that category of acute emergencies which require a very tight, very joined up approach of all

available partners – multilateral, governmental, non-governmental and community-based – for humanitarian efforts to succeed. Massive resources are already needed, and I join those colleagues who have spoken at this conference to appeal for donors - in the persistent, tragic absence of a political solution - to at least multiply efforts to save the innocent people affected by war.

My appeal is directed particularly at partners in the Gulf region. Two months ago, the Kuwait Conference provided to the world an example of partnership in action, with governments, international organizations and NGOs committing to help the victims of the Syrian war. We should commend once again His Highness the Emir of Kuwait for this extraordinary initiative. It is therefore all the more important that pledges made in Kuwait in the presence of the United Nations Secretary-General are realized as soon as possible, and through agreed channels, to support desperately under-resourced humanitarian efforts.

Partnerships, in conclusion, are indispensable to bringing relief and supporting development. Many of us have very specific mandates or core work to carry out. Partnerships must and will respect, and actually strengthen, these mandates. Partnerships on the ground save lives, save resources and multiply the benefits. Partnerships in advocacy shine light and bring responsibility to bear. These three days together have been a recognition of our shared commitment. The hurdles are enormous, and we must ensure that our work together is not only effective in meeting needs, but also mindful of the broader context, and conscious of the responsibility to solve the problems that create human suffering.

Thank you.