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The Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau, PC, MP  
Minister for International Development and La Francophonie,  
House of Commons,  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

[Marie-Claude.Bibeau@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Marie-Claude.Bibeau@parl.gc.ca)

RE: Canadian cooperation and leadership in the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)

Dear Minister Bibeau,

Warm greetings to you from The United Church of Canada. Together with other leaders of Canadian churches, [I wrote to you in November 2016 to express our appreciation](#) for the Government of Canada's commitment of \$25 million annually to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), to support education and healthcare for Palestinian refugee children, women and men.

Today UNRWA is facing a formidable challenge in preserving those key services and in upholding its very mandate. This comes as a result of the recent announcement by the US government to reduce its 2018 UNRWA pledge to \$60 million, down sharply from its 2017 contribution of US\$350 million.

We are deeply concerned about what this means for Palestinian refugee children, women and men. We know that providing humanitarian assistance and responding to the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable is a priority of Canada's foreign policy and international development agenda, and write to urge that Canada step forward to provide global leadership and action.

The reduction in UNRWA funding jeopardizes access to basic education for 525,000 girls and boys at 700 UNRWA schools, and the future of those children. Primary health care for Palestinian families is put at risk, including pre-natal care and other life-saving services. These cuts threaten the continuation of emergency food and cash assistance to 1.7 million extremely vulnerable Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In short, what is at stake are the rights and dignity of an entire community of 5.3 million Palestinian refugees, many of whom are women and girls, who have endured 70 years of injustice and uncertainty.

We ask that Canada join with other states demonstrating multilateral cooperation and collaboration, supporting UNRWA in saying to Palestine refugees that their rights and future matter by:

1. Frontloading the Canadian 2018 contribution and as possible increasing funding to the Agency, to ensure UNRWA services, particularly its 700 schools and 137 clinics, can be sustained throughout the year;
2. Joining UNRWA in creating new funding alliances and initiatives to ensure the dignity of Palestine refugee children and their families is preserved through all its services (education, health, relief and social services, camp improvement and rehabilitation, humanitarian aid, protection).

Palestinian refugees are among the most vulnerable communities in the world. We welcomed Foreign Minister Freeland's statement that Canada is committed to contribute in positive and constructive ways to an international order based on rules, in which "more powerful countries are constrained in their treatment of smaller ones by standards that are internationally respected, enforced and upheld."

In the same spirit of concern for Palestinian refugees, Canadian churches and agencies continue with support to partners in the region for their humanitarian relief and development efforts. We continue to believe that Canada possesses the resources to make UNRWA's health and education program for Palestinian refugees stronger and more robust, in collaboration with other governments. For this to be truly effective in the long-term, efforts to secure a just and lasting peace in the region are urgently needed, and we continue to encourage the Government of Canada to support initiatives that result in peace with justice between Israel and Palestine.

We pray for your leadership in Canada's efforts toward a more just, peaceful and equitable world for all.



The Right Rev. Jordan Cantwell  
Moderator/Modératrice  
The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada

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