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September 4, 2018

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. In March this year, the Moderator of The United Church of Canada wrote to you expressing appreciation to the Government of Canada for its response to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) emergency appeal for West Bank and Gaza. That pledge of additional Canadian funds of up to \$10 million was critically needed to provide humanitarian assistance for Palestinian refugees, described as "some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised people on this planet". Canadian compassion and concern for those at extreme risk was conveyed by that action.

We write once again today related to UNRWA, deeply concerned about the impact of the decision by the American government to cease all funding, leaving it with a \$446 million shortfall for 2018. We ask the Canadian government to demonstrate continued international leadership by joining other countries in providing further funding to UNRWA and strengthened support to the agency in creating new funding alliances and initiatives to ensure the life and dignity of Palestine refugee children and their families. You know that UNRWA has provided critical services - basic education for 525,000 boys and girls at over 700 UNRWA schools; healthcare and medicine for 3.5 million Palestine refugees at 150 clinics; essential food and cash assistance for 1.7 million extremely vulnerable refugees.

The United Church urges Canada to step into this crisis, and live out its international assistance policy and commitment to uphold human dignity, humanitarian principles, international laws and human rights. Specifically, we ask the Government of Canada affirm the current UNWRA definition of Palestinian refugees, taking special effort at this time to uphold this understanding in public statements and international fora. For as noted by UNRWA Commissioner -Pierre Krähenbühl, *"There is sadly nothing unique in the protracted nature of the Palestine refugee crisis. Refugees in places like Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Congo and beyond have also experienced decades of displacement and lack of resolution. Their children and grandchildren are similarly recognized as refugees and assisted by UNHCR. Enshrined in the principle of humanity and the international law norm of family unity is the commitment to continue serving communities affected by war until a political solution has been found. It is the failure to end conflicts that prolongs refugee situations and denies refugees the choice to define a dignified future of their own."*

A combination of humanitarian commitment and political will from Canada and the international community is required to address the ongoing crisis in the West Bank and Gaza. Immediate, increased humanitarian aid is essential; collaborative international effort to secure a just and lasting peace in the region is just as urgently needed. Be assured of our continued prayer and support for that all initiatives that move closer to the goal of peace with justice for Israel and Palestine.



Sincerely,



Michael Blair  
Executive Minister  
Church in Mission  
The United Church of Canada

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