



unrwa
usa



ANNUAL REPORT

AD

2015

“Palestine refugees are not statistics nor are they victims only.

They are, like we all wish to be, actors of their own destinies and we must consider them as such.

I want UNRWA at 65 to stand not for misery and poverty alleviation, but for hope and dignity.”

**- Pierre Krähenbühl,
UNRWA Commissioner-General**

Letter from our leaders

Dear Friends,

We had hoped that 2015 would be a year of calm for Palestine refugees following the devastation of 2014. We hoped that it would be a year in which they could begin to rebuild their lives, particularly in Gaza and Syria. Sadly, 2015 came with its own grave challenges. It brought one of the largest funding shortfalls in UNRWA's history, which threatened the education of half a million Palestine refugee students.

As the world experiences the worst refugee crisis since World War II, Palestine refugees are in danger of being overlooked -- particularly those who are experiencing their second, third, and fourth displacements in Syria. In 2015, the war in Syria continued for a fourth catastrophic year, leaving over half a million Palestine refugees in need of critical assistance. Those who fled to Lebanon and Jordan were left especially vulnerable, with little support beyond that of UNRWA.

In the occupied Palestinian territory, the situation continued to deteriorate, especially for Palestine refugees. Over a year after the 2014 Israeli military assault on Gaza, the pace of reconstruction remained painfully slow. Thousands of internally displaced Palestinians were still living in UNRWA schools up until June 2015. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Palestinian displacement, injuries, and deaths due to the illegal military occupation occurred at the highest rates in years. The situation is simply not sustainable -- or acceptable.

In spite of grave challenges, UNRWA USA remains determined to do everything possible here in the United States to support Palestine refugees as they continue to build (and rebuild, as is the case in Gaza) their lives in 2015. And you have been with us every step of the way.

From emergency assistance in Syria to shelter repair and psychosocial support in Gaza, you were there. From providing university scholarships in the occupied Palestinian territory to supporting Palestine refugees from Syria who fled to Lebanon, you were there. Whether it was urgently needed assistance or long-term investments, you showed your steadfast support for Palestine refugees as they worked with UNRWA to rebuild their futures.

Witnessing the growth of UNRWA USA over the past few years has been inspiring. It is a testament to the commitment of the American community to helping Palestine refugees reach their full potential and rebuild the future in the face of occupation, ongoing displacement, and war.

Your compassion and generosity are what allow us to do the work that we do. You are UNRWA USA.

With immense gratitude,



Amb. (ret.) Philip C. Wilcox, Jr.
Chairman



Abby Smardon
Executive Director

meet unrwa usa

American Friends of UNRWA (UNRWA USA) is a nonprofit organization that supports the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Our mission is to promote a life of dignity and human development for Palestine refugees by informing the American public about UNRWA's work and generating support for its programs through fundraising, education, and advocacy.

board & staff



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Executive Director



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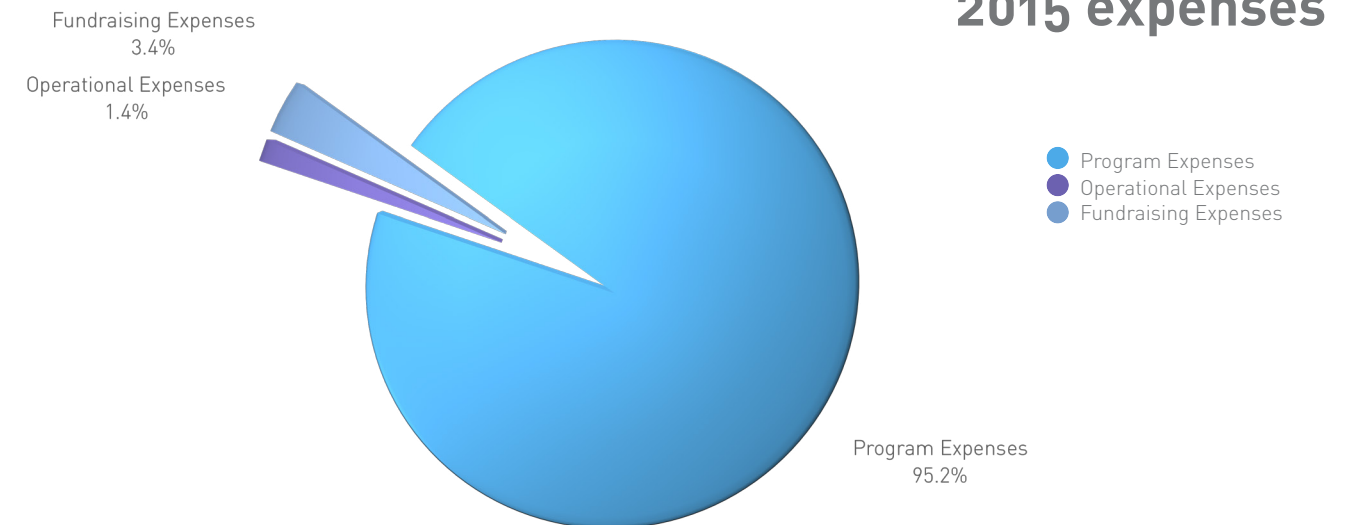
2015 contributions to unrwa

oPt Emergency Appeal	\$886,020.35
Syria Emergency Appeal	\$381,756.02
General Fund	\$342,000.00
Projects	\$181,503.00

total contributions to UNRWA in 2015

\$1,791,279

budgeted goal \$1,013,000



	2015	2014	2013
Total Revenue	\$1,859,615.00	\$3,688,867.00	\$729,120.00
Contributions to UNRWA	\$1,791,279.00	\$3,107,637.00	\$324,937.00

2014 saw an unprecedented amount of support due to the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip. While we regret the tragic circumstances that prompted this, we are proud to maintain many of those supporters through 2015 and beyond.



unrwa: facing financial crisis

unrwa usa field visit to the occupied palestinian territory

Every year, UNRWA USA staff visit the field to gain an idea of daily life for Palestine refugees, see UNRWA's work in action, and report back to our donors on projects they supported.

In March, our Executive Director, Abby, and Communications Officer, Laila, traveled to the occupied Palestinian territory (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip) with UNRWA USA board member Elizabeth Kucinich.

On the trip, they met with colleagues, followed up on UNRWA USA-funded shelter rehabilitation projects, carried out donor stewardship activities, were briefed on protection issues in the West Bank, and bore witness to the situation in Gaza after last year's brutal assault.

For Elizabeth, the trip served as an opportunity to witness the situation on the ground, particularly in Gaza, firsthand.



In the midst of the largest refugee crisis since World War II, one of the largest funding shortfalls in UNRWA's history jeopardized the beginning of the school year for half a million Palestine refugee students across the region.

This funding crisis was foreshadowed in January 2015 with the temporary suspension of the cash assistance program in Gaza for repairs to damaged and destroyed homes, as well as rental subsidies for the homeless. In the end, significant cost-reducing internal measures, and the support of generous donor and host countries, allowed UNRWA to overcome the funding crisis and begin the school year. Throughout, UNRWA consistently reminded the international community that neglecting the plight of Palestine refugees is a risk the world cannot take.

UNRWA forecasted a budget shortfall of \$101 million for 2015. An increasingly unstable region meant that many in the international community were on the verge of overlooking, or forgetting, the hardships endured by Palestine refugees for decades.

"We fought very hard to create a revival of solidarity for Palestine refugees and a renewed understanding of the importance of respecting their rights and addressing their needs adequately and predictably."

- Pierre Krähenbühl, UNRWA Commissioner-General



west bank, oPt creating employment opportunities

life under occupation

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, violates Palestinians' human rights on a daily basis. The occupation negatively impacts every aspect of life, such as freedom of movement and access to basic services like as healthcare, safety and security, education, employment opportunities, and more.

Settlement expansion and settler violence continue with relative impunity, resulting in death, injury, and damage to private property for Palestinians. Many Palestinians in the West Bank, including refugees, remain at high risk of displacement and dispossession due to home demolitions.

The Israeli occupation has a severe impact on the Palestinian economy, and particularly on the living conditions of Palestine refugees. UNRWA's Job Creation Programme provides temporary employment for refugees to alleviate poverty and unemployment levels.

In 2015, 50 Palestine refugee farmers benefited from UNRWA USA's Olive Tree Initiative, which plants olive trees in the name of donors who contribute \$500 or more.



unrwa usa contribution

\$25,000

job creation programme

scholarship fund

Access to higher education is limited for many Palestine refugees due to their difficult socioeconomic situation.

Too often, once access to higher education is out of reach, so are employment opportunities and the chance to improve living conditions.

2015 was the most successful year yet for UNRWA USA's university Scholarship Fund, which provides funding for UNRWA's University Scholarship Program.

These scholarships cover full university tuition in the region for high-achieving Palestine refugee students in UNRWA's five fields of operation, and who show a substantial family need for support.

45 palestine refugee students received university scholarships through US sponsors

giving back

In November, Maher Nasser, Director of the Outreach Division in the UN Department of Public Information and a former UNRWA staff member, ran the NYC Marathon to raise money for our university scholarship program. He was motivated by his personal experience as a Palestine refugee. Maher attended Birzeit University on an UNRWA scholarship in the early 1980s.

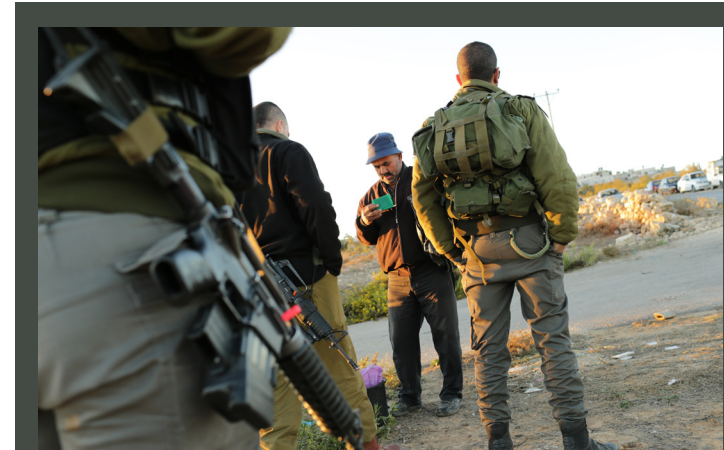
Maher raised \$28,485 for UNRWA's scholarship program in the West Bank, funding the education of three students.



Maher Nasser
Running the New York City Marathon to raise funds for university scholarships for Palestinian refugee students in Gaza and the West Bank

Donate

MY GOAL: **\$32,000**
RAISED SO FAR: **\$28,785**
OF DONATIONS: **163**



2015 was the deadliest year since 2006 for Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. 28 Palestinian children were killed by Israeli forces and settlers in the West Bank last year. 12 of them were Palestine refugees.

Beginning in October 2015, there was a sharp increase in violence and operations by Israeli forces, access restrictions, forced displacement, demolitions, and other rights violations. That, and the subsequent Palestinian popular response, resulted in skyrocketing Palestinian casualties and injuries.



gaza strip, oPt

rebuilding homes and lives after the 2014 israeli military assault

Over a year after the latest brutal military assault on Gaza, the pace and scale of reconstruction remains painfully slow. Limited resources and Israeli restrictions on imports mean that rebuilding, and simply clearing the rubble, are difficult tasks.

In January 2015, UNRWA was forced to temporarily suspend its cash assistance program in Gaza for tens of thousands of Palestine refugees. The program was intended to provide funds for repairs on damaged and destroyed homes, and for rental subsidies for those made homeless in the military assault.

The August 2014 official cessation of hostilities did nothing to address the underlying causes. Namel, the ongoing Israeli occupation, which is manifested in the illegal blockade on the coastal enclave, and the increasing unlivability of the Gaza Strip.

In order to help UNRWA meet the needs of Palestine refugees in Gaza, UNRWA USA mobilized its supporters and made repairs possible on 240 Palestine refugee homes, as well as provided rental assistance for 500 families.



unrwa usa
contribution
\$822,300
emergency appeal



With support from UNRWA, and more than a year after the assault, the Zaza family was the first Palestine refugee family to complete reconstruction on their totally demolished home.

“The war is still inside us, burned into our souls, but I wanted my family and me to move on. What we went through was difficult - a nightmare - but this time it seems to have concluded with a happy ending,” says Atef Zaza.

Atef, Fatima, and their 12 children lost their home in eastern Gaza City during the 2014 Israeli assault.

In 2015, UNRWA assistance allowed the Zaza family to become the first Palestine refugee family to complete reconstruction on their totally demolished home.

“I wanted to give back to my family the intimate place they used to have before. I challenged myself to finish reconstruction before the Eid holidays. After 70 days, my house was completely reconstructed and I held the new keys in my hand; at that moment, I felt relieved and happy, and I wanted to give the keys to my wife and show her the house and everything in it.”

unrwa photo archives exhibition brings support to gaza



An exhibition from UNRWA’s photo archives, “The Long Journey,” was displayed at the UN General Assembly in January 2015.

Working with UNRWA, we brought “The Long Journey” to Alwan for the Arts in Manhattan, New York from January to February, and then to the Palestinian American Community Center in New Jersey from May to June. The exhibition served as an educational tool, generating significant interest.

Photo auctions at the closing receptions raised \$25,581 to benefit Gaza through UNRWA’s oPt Emergency Appeal.

a roundtable with commissioner-general krähenbühl

Six months after the 2014 assault on Gaza, UNRWA Commissioner-General (CG) Pierre Krähenbühl visited the US and spoke at a private roundtable event hosted by UNRWA USA, and moderated by UNRWA USA Chairman Amb. (ret.) Phil Wilcox, Jr. NGO leaders, partners, and top-level donors from the DC metro area were in attendance.

The CG discussed the unmet needs of refugees in Gaza, obstacles to reconstruction, the slow pace of donor contributions, and their implications for the future.

He shared the story of 11-year-old Rua’, whose notebook he found the rubble of an UNRWA school. In it, she had written a poem with the line “hope does not betray” - a powerful message to us all.





gaza 5k walk/runs

supporting mental health for children in gaza

community mental health programme

UNRWA's Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP) provides school, group, and at-home counseling for Palestine refugees in Gaza.

Following the devastating assault on Gaza in 2014, countless children are showing signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health issues. Any child aged eight years or older has now lived through three Israeli military assaults on the coastal enclave.

UNRWA school counselors use a variety of therapy practices to provide a broad range of effective treatment for children showing signs of psychological trauma such as intense fear, bed-wetting, poor concentration, eating disorders, sleeping disorders, irritability, and hyperactivity. Traditional one-on-one and group therapy sessions give children an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings in a safe space. Art and play therapies provide children with outlets to develop healthy mental health practices and resiliency.

If left untreated, these children face the risk of permanent social and physical health issues. Immediate and ongoing treatment is critical to helping children restore their sense of safety and security in the midst of the ongoing chaos.

Our signature event, the Gaza 5K, raises funds to provide UNRWA counseling for Palestine refugee children suffering from psychological trauma. The 5Ks are fun, family-friendly events that bring Americans together to show solidarity with Gaza. In 2015, we expanded the charity race to four cities.

new york city | washington dc | san francisco | orange county



2,747 participants

4 cities

\$388,397 raised

12,947 children helped

syria

providing humanitarian assistance in times of war

Tragically, the war in Syria only intensified in 2015, compounding civilian suffering and humanitarian and protection needs. Palestine refugees are disproportionately affected by the conflict, and over two-thirds of the estimated 450,000 remaining in Syria are internally displaced.

430,000 - 95% of them - are in need of sustained humanitarian assistance and are reliant on UNRWA for these lifelines. Tens of thousands are experiencing yet another exile; an estimated 42,000 have fled to Lebanon, and more than 17,000 are in Jordan.

The majority of these Palestine refugees are in a precarious, marginalized position due to their irregular legal status and dependence on UNRWA for their basic humanitarian needs.

UNRWA USA's \$313,000 contribution to the emergency appeal helped UNRWA provide critical life-saving assistance to Palestine refugees displaced both within and outside of Syria, as well as deliver aid to civilians in hard to reach areas.



unrwa usa
contribution

\$313,000
syria emergency
appeal



crisis in yarmouk

Tens of thousands of Palestine refugees are trapped in areas of active conflict in Syria, with extremely constrained access to humanitarian assistance. Yarmouk refugee camp, on the outskirts of Damascus, is a prime example. Under siege since July 2013, UNRWA has only been able to obtain intermittent and limited access to Yarmouk. The once vibrant camp's population has dwindled from 160,000 to far less than 18,000, but the exact number of civilians remaining in the camp in 2015 is now unknown.

After extremist groups captured the majority of Yarmouk in April, a third wave of displacements occurred. UNRWA established humanitarian operations in areas around the camp, delivering aid to thousands of civilians. **Through UNRWA, we provided food assistance to 23,657 civilians.**

in action

showing palestine refugees americans care



advocating for the end of the blockade on gaza

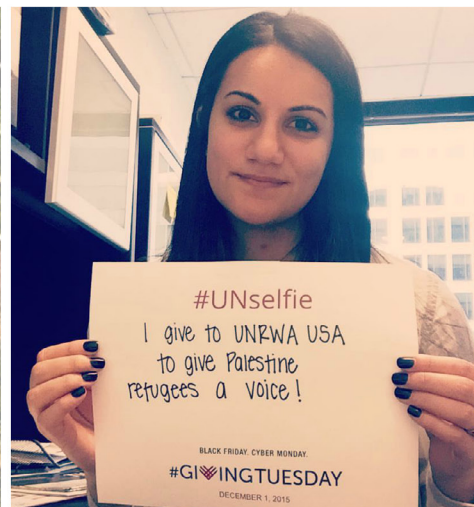
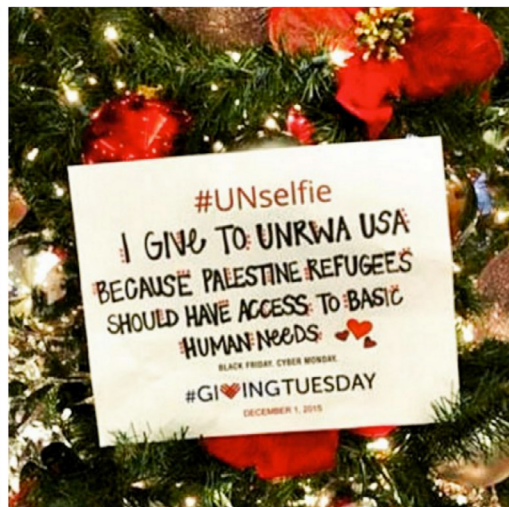
The blockade, now in its eighth year, continues to devastate livelihoods, the economy, public resources, and more.

Coping mechanisms are being eroded. Without immediate and meaningful action, the future is bleak.

Because of this, we launched a petition via change.org demanding an end to the blockade on Gaza and the familiar cycle of destruction and reconstruction. **The petition garnered 2,334 signatures.**

At the time of launching, 10,000 Palestinians in Gaza were still living in temporary shelters.

#GivingTuesday falls on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. We joined the conversation on social media, catching the attention of thousands. With the help of our followers, we showed the world that Americans care about Palestine refugees.



voices of unrwa

"The only thing that can change the future is education."



We launched a blog (unrwausa.tumblr.com) on World Refugee Day 2015 to feature the stories of Palestine refugees and UNRWA staff.



ottawa run for palestine raises \$24,312

The Ottawa Run for Palestine is a Canadian nonprofit. Their volunteers coordinate a 5K run every year. In September, they chose UNRWA USA as their beneficiary. Like our Gaza 5Ks, funds raised were contributed to UNRWA's Community Mental Health Programme.

"I'm involved with UNRWA USA because they looks past the politics of what is arguably the most politicized conflict of our time. They hone in on what matters: the Palestine refugees, what they need, and how to get it to them."

- Manal Jamal, NYC Gaza 5K volunteer



“Palestine refugees deserve our attention, our response and the preservation of hope.

We must work together to ensure that this is achievable. We cannot see them only as victims.

They are, with our humble support, actors of their own destiny and we cannot betray their expectations.”

- Pierre Krähenbühl,
UNRWA Commissioner-General

unrwa usa

1666 k street nw suite 440
washington dc 20006

202-223-3767

info@unrwausa.org

unrwausa.org

connect with @unrwausa

