

Governments must step up to fill the UNRWA funding gap left by the US

Written by Mariela Baeva on 2 February 2018



Donald Trump | *Photo credit: Press Association*

Governments must step up to fill the UNRWA funding gap left by the US, and ensure continued access to education for children in war-torn countries, writes Mariela Baeva.

US President Donald Trump has cut two-thirds of his country's funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA). Among other services, UNRWA runs schools in war-torn Syria and across Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza and the West Bank. Palestinian refugee children across the region have enjoyed access to education for over 60 years. Until now.

Without notice, Trump's decision has dashed hopes that teachers and UNRWA staff - over 20,000 people - can keep working to serve the educational needs of 500,000 children in over 700 schools.

It's time to step up and send a message to governments, donors and individuals, as well as to some of

UNRWA's solid supporters, to make sure extra funds will be allocated to bridge the funding gap.

Some EU member states - Belgium and Sweden in particular - have translated into positive steps their concern of failing to keep schools open for Palestinian children. The financial support for

UNRWA's Education in Emergencies programme means the world to Gaza teens and their safe access to education day in and day out.

The Netherlands has just taken urgent action. A fast-track support of several million euros has been made available to the UN agency to keep its service provision afloat.

Norway has just announced the country's contribution of \$16m and has urged other donors to do their part as soon as possible.

Other governments must take a stand and follow these countries' lead.

To protect education for Palestinian refugee children, long-term funding will guarantee discernible progress.

UNRWA has just launched the #DignityIsPriceless campaign. The purpose of this global fundraising initiative is to gather \$500m and help protect Palestinian schooling under the slogan, 'In the worst of times, dignity and hope can thrive'.

As 13-year-old Karim says, "We want the world to support us in becoming global citizens and pursue our dreams and aspirations."

UNRWA student Majd, who goes to school in Ein al-Sultan Camp in Jericho, has sent a personal appeal to Pope Francis to support the students' quest to preserve their education.

Governments, international donors and individuals must do everything they can to make sure additional funds allow for the viability of the UN's education programmes targeting primary schooling for hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children.

About the author

Mariela Baeva is a former ALDE group MEP for Bulgaria

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