

5 April 2018

The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, P.C., M.P.
Minister for International Development and La Francophonie
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Bibeau,

I am writing on behalf of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada to express our appreciation for the Canadian government's recent decision to contribute up to \$10 million in emergency assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

MCC began working with Palestinians in 1949 in response to the refugee crisis created during the Arab-Israeli war. Today, the local partners with whom we work across Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, West Bank and Gaza—where social and economic realities are particularly dire—tell us that Palestinian refugees are among the poorest and most vulnerable in the Middle East.

Given our longstanding experience, MCC was greatly encouraged by the Government of Canada's decision in fall of 2016 to reinstate \$25 million in annual funding to UNRWA. Our experience has shown us that providing steady access to emergency services, health care, and education for children, women, and men devastated by violence, displacement, and social upheaval builds resilience. It also helps ensure that those dealing with trauma—particularly youth—are not at risk of being drawn into further cycles of violence.

As you are well aware, today UNRWA is facing extremely difficult challenges in preserving its essential services due to drastic U.S. funding cuts. A reduction or complete suspension of any UNRWA programs would be devastating for the millions of people who rely on its services.

For this reason, we join with other Canadian churches and church agencies in thanking the Government of Canada for its recent funding announcement. Given the scope and scale of human need, however, we urge you to ensure that the \$10 million financial contribution stands in addition to Canada's \$25 million annual funding commitment. Further, we strongly encourage you to consider frontloading the 2018 contribution to ensure UNRWA services and programs—particularly its vital schools and health clinics—can be maintained.

As an organization dedicated to realizing peace and justice around the world, MCC will continue to support our local partners who work tirelessly to address the humanitarian needs of vulnerable Palestinian refugees across the region. For this work to build a truly sustainable future, however, we believe that robust international efforts towards a just and peaceful resolution of existing conflicts throughout the Middle East are also urgently needed. We therefore urge the Government of Canada to

take strong leadership in pressing for a diplomatic resolution based on human rights and adherence to international law.

On behalf of MCC, I thank you once again for Canada's leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Bauman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rick Cober Bauman
Executive Director
MCC Canada

CC: Celina Caesar-Chavannes, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development
Ziad Aboultaf, Official Opposition Critic, Conservative Party of Canada
Linda Duncan, Opposition Critic, New Democratic Party of Canada
Luc Thériault, Opposition Critic, Bloc Québécois
Elizabeth May, Leader, Green Party of Canada