



the commissioner-general
المفوض العام

East Jerusalem, 4 September 2019

Dear Ms. Feinberg,
Dear Ms. Gilbrin,

I am writing to express my sincere appreciation for the 2017 – 2018 MOPAN assessment of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). I would like to thank all members of Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), the MOPAN secretariat and IOD PARC for their extremely collaborative and constructive engagement throughout the assessment process. I am also grateful for the leadership shown by Denmark and Switzerland in their roles as institutional leads, on behalf of MOPAN members.

UNRWA values highly the work of MOPAN and attaches great importance to its assessments. Its impartial and robust approach is critical for accountability, institutional learning, organisational effectiveness and stakeholder confidence. It also provides a valuable platform for dialogue – and follow-up – around common priorities identified by MOPAN.

The 2017 – 18 assessment presents the Agency and its stakeholders with an opportunity to take stock of programmatic and operational management, and draw forward-looking conclusions about what has worked, and where UNRWA has more to do. This very much includes successful reforms in recent years as well as our performance, backed the international community, in responding to the existential financial crisis that confronted UNRWA operations in 2018. I sincerely hope that the report will serve as a key point of reference for discussions with donor and host partners, and other stakeholders, regarding the Agency's management, operations, commitment to transparency and focus on continuous improvement.

Ms. Nathalia Feinberg
Representative – Head of Mission
Royal Danish Representative Office
Ramallah

Ms. Marie Gilbrin Duruz
Director of Swiss Cooperation Office Gaza and West Bank
Swiss Agency For Development and Cooperation
Jerusalem

More specifically, I am pleased to note that MOPAN provides a very positive assessment of UNRWA's performance, with the Agency ranking highly satisfactory or satisfactory in all of the 11 performance indicators applied. This compares favourably with other institutions assessed in the same MOPAN cycle. I welcome the conclusion that UNRWA is "competent, resilient and resolute". I also note with appreciation the recognition of the positive trajectory the Agency has charted since the last MOPAN assessment in 2011. That this has been done in an extremely challenging operational and financial environment, exemplified recently by the unprecedented funding crisis in 2018, which was brought to a positive resolution, MOPAN attributes in significant measure to "strong leadership – externally and internally – and a mature, robust and resilient organizational architecture."

Regarding the strengths cited in the assessment, I would like to highlight the following as particularly relevant:

- The commitment of UNRWA staff - the majority of whom are Palestine refugees themselves - and their unique knowledge of the communities they serve. As acknowledged by the assessment, this ensures a deep and dynamic understanding of context and needs across different fields of operation and is the foundation for effective programming and response to humanitarian crises.
- The high quality of service delivery in core programmes and improvements in efficiency, reflecting high levels of technical competence and the overall success of education and health reforms.
- The maturity of UNRWA's results-based management and evaluative thinking, which is supported by a continual strengthening of strategy and performance management, as well as the use of results reporting and data to inform decision making.
- The Agency's rigorous approach to risk and budget management, the quality of its financial frameworks, and strategic engagement with its stakeholders, which have been instrumental in helping us to address and overcome the myriad challenges faced in recent years.
- The strengthened delivery of protection programming and protection and gender mainstreaming, including in the area of gender-based violence.
- The alignment of UNRWA operations and strategies with global frameworks, notably the Sustainable Development Goals.

Recognition of progress on the above listed issues - all of which are corporate priorities - is welcomed given their centrality to successfully discharging our mandate in support of Palestine refugees. In the coming years, we will continue efforts to further strengthen our capacity in these areas.

The MOPAN assessment also identifies a number of areas for improvement. We take note of these and would like to elaborate on the actions and initiatives that are already underway and others that are planned to address identified gaps:

1. A lack of strategic evaluations

We recognize that despite our commitment to a robust evaluation function, various constraints have hindered its development as an internal tool, owing to limitations in coverage and quantity of evaluations. The Agency recognises the need for appropriate actions to reverse this trend and is focussing on the following objectives through to the end of 2021:

- i. Building and further strengthening the central evaluation team – a new Chief of the UNRWA Evaluation Division was appointed within the Department of Internal Oversight Services in April 2019, and two additional evaluation staff will be recruited during the course of this year. This team will prioritize the delivery of centrally managed evaluations in 2020 and 2021. In the meantime, in 2019, the Evaluation Division will evaluate the monitoring and reporting arrangements of the 2016 – 2021 Medium Term Strategy (MTS). The adequacy of resources for the Evaluation Division shall be given due consideration in the 2020 budget, in the context of the Agency's need for strategic and programmatic level evaluations, while being mindful of the overall financial situation;
- ii. Additionally, the Evaluation Division will continue to support decentralized evaluations. By the end of 2019, the Division will develop a strategy and action plan to strengthen field level capacity to manage decentralized evaluations, while continuing to provide quality assurance and technical guidance for on-going decentralized evaluations; and
- iii. By the end of 2019, the Evaluation Division will review and consider updates to UNRWA's Evaluation Policy and operational guidelines.

2. The need to further advance the delivery of a protection agenda

UNRWA fully acknowledges the limitations associated with the projectized approach to protection. As noted by MOPAN, the Agency has made a series of investments to deliver on its protection priorities, including the establishment of the Protection Division in 2016 and protection teams in all field offices from 2015, and has also put in place key strategies, policies and frameworks. However, the protection function of the Agency was significantly affected by the 2018 funding crisis, since 70 per cent of protection funding was being contributed by the US Government. As this support is no longer available, protection staffing has fallen considerably. Coming at a time when the protection challenges faced by Palestine refugees remain significant, this situation underscores the fragility of external resourcing for protection within UNRWA.

Nevertheless, in response to these developments and in line with the areas for improvement outlined in the MOPAN report, UNRWA has already taken a number of corrective measures. Protection staffing has been reviewed and funding made available for a core structure, while strategic protection priorities are being refocused to align with funding realities.

Even as we refocus protection, its continued strength will require ongoing management support to ensure it weathers new challenges, noting that many projects enabling protection activities are expected to expire in the coming months. UNRWA will continue to actively engage donors and other stakeholders on these issues. In addition, as part of the 2020 budget planning process, the Agency will develop a budget to advance the delivery of protection in line with MTS protection objectives and targets. Increasing the proportion of funds available to the protection function will be contingent, however, on broader efforts to mobilize resources for the Programme Budget and other UNRWA funding portals.

3. Improving cross-cutting approaches to gender equality and environmental sustainability

i. Gender equality

UNRWA recognises this is an important area for improvement across the organization, in particular further strengthening the gender architecture and to prevent gender being 'projectized' or siloed within one programme area. Indeed, the Agency's Gender Equality Strategy (2016-21), aims to reinforce gender-based structures and accountability frameworks across UNRWA, in accordance with its mandate and UN system requirements. This approach is very much the vision of gender mainstreaming by the Agency, be it in terms of programming for beneficiaries or equal representation of women at senior levels, among other things

Unfortunately, given the lack of available funds in recent years, UNRWA has not been able to put these structures in place or recruit the envisaged dedicated staff as part of the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy. While it considers solutions to the challenges, the Agency will identify measures that can be taken in the near term within the gender focal point system it operates to ensure greater coherence and consistency within the context of its Gender Task Force. While the Gender Section within the Protection Division will continue to provide strategic direction on gender mainstreaming, UNRWA's programme departments will maintain operational responsibility for the specific tasks this entails.

ii. Environment

We acknowledge that UNRWA has a role to play in addressing environmental issues within the Palestine refugee community across its fields of operation and an obligation to contribute to UN system-wide environmental goals, in particular minimizing the impact of our own operations that contribute to climate change. Progress made in some areas – for example, we have scaled back vehicle fleet use – must be expanded to priority areas. An important step is building staff capacity in the area of environmental management, so that programmes and fields can collaborate more energetically. We are currently in the process of recruiting experts in this area.

As we begin finalizing an Environmental Management Framework/Policy the Agency is demonstrating new commitments to developing tools, guidelines and instructions to integrate Environmental, Social, Health and Safety (ESHS) in UNRWA operations. We are also recruiting a Senior Environmental Engineer (at HQ -Amman) and Environmental Social Officers in our Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan Field Offices, to build in-house capacity and ensure that environmental issues are duly addressed in our upcoming projects.

- The Agency has already implemented a range of measures at the Field and HQ levels that address ESHS in our construction works and other aspects of our operations. These include:
- The installation of energy saving equipment, such as solar panels, water heaters and LED fittings, in a number of schools and other installations, and in rehabilitated shelters
- Measures to protect water resources
- Initiatives to improve health condition in camps
- The development of a Solid Waste Management Framework and a Solid Waste Management (SWM) strategy for Field Offices

4. Further enhancing the strategic management of the workforce

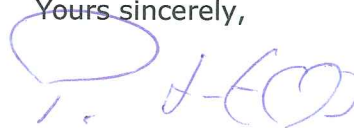
The MOPAN report rightly recognizes that the quality of UNRWA's operations and service delivery is dependent on the skill, competence and commitment of the Agency's 30,000 staff. Accordingly, effective staff performance management systems and human resource (HR) policies are important components of UNRWA's regulatory framework.

We recognize that actions are needed to strengthen certain aspects of these systems and policies. In a phased approach, the Agency will strengthen its approach to workforce and strategic personnel management and its recruitment and talent acquisition processes. On workforce and performance management, we have recently established a HQ-based HR strategic planning and monitoring function to develop and implement strategic workforce planning, monitoring and reporting across the Agency. This will include assessing the current workforce, key staffing gaps and likely future demands for resources, through rigorous data and risk analysis, the development of strategies to close gaps, and the mainstreaming of workforce planning into corporate planning processes. We are also looking to revamp performance management policies and process.

In relation to recruitment and talent acquisition, we are currently assessing the feasibility of signing up to the UN's Inspira recruitment system. This would simplify the application process for candidates and ensure greater harmonization with other UN entities, thereby potentially increasing the pool of qualified candidates for UNRWA vacancies.

In closing, I would like once again to express my deep appreciation to all partners involved in preparation of the MOPAN assessment, first and foremost to the Governments of Denmark and Switzerland, and to MOPAN members, the MOPAN Secretariat and IOD PARC for their constructive and committed engagement throughout the process. With this assessment in hand, we collectively express the sincere, firm commitment of the international community to supporting the human development and protection of Palestine refugees, consistent with UNRWA's mandate and in the absence of a just and lasting political solution to the conflict. To all concerned – and I refer here also to the refugees – this commitment is of crucial significance at this most challenging time.

Yours sincerely,



Pierre Krähenbühl