



PRESS RELEASE

A thousand Gaza school students fly kites in solidarity with Japanese earthquake survivors

10 March 2015
Gaza

On the fourth anniversary of the most powerful earthquake ever to hit Japan, a message of continued empathy and solidarity took to the skies of Gaza. On, Monday 9 March 2015, over 1,000 Palestine refugee students from UNRWA schools in Gaza gathered to fly kites in commemoration of the disaster that killed thousands of people and caused immense damage. In the spirit of the constantly strengthening relationship between Japan and Palestine refugees in Gaza, the event this year was held jointly with Kamaishi, a city in Japan severely affected by the tsunami.

The UNRWA students in Gaza were joining the '3.11 Fly! Kites of Hope' campaign first organized by Akihiko Nara in Japan. In a message, Mr. Nara said the idea for the 3.11 campaign had come to him after reading an article about an event in Gaza where 13,000 children gathered to fly kites. Noting the respite that the UNRWA summer games had created for children in such difficult circumstances, he said: "Children in the 3.11 disaster area had been in the same situation. I thought it could be a good chance to commemorate the victims of the horrible disaster."

At the event in Gaza, Junya Matsuura, Ambassador for the Palestinian Affairs, said, "Japan would like to express its appreciation for all the encouragement and solidarity which has been extended from Palestinian refugees in Gaza towards victims of earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Children of Gaza are still suffering a lot from the blockade and distress. Japan would like to show its solidarity with them and will continue its efforts in helping them mitigate their sufferings." Mr. Matsuura received two handmade kites from Palestine refugee children as a

gift to the people of Japan. The Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Robert Turner, paid tribute to the children of Gaza, saying, “The children participating here today embody the generous spirit of the Palestinian people, empathizing with others despite the horrible and disastrous conditions they themselves face on a daily basis.”

In partnership with RESULTS Japan, a parallel kite-flying event took place in Kamaishi on 8 March. Reflecting the connectedness of the Japanese and Palestinian people, a photo exhibition on Gaza was also held in Kamaishi and a Skype exchange occurred between the two cities on 9 March.

The fourth annual kite-flying event in Khan Younis highlights the close relationship between Japanese people and Palestine refugees in Gaza. Even while recovering from the earthquake and tsunami, Japan did not abandon its support for Palestine refugees. This year, as Gaza is still reeling from 50 days of conflict last summer but has not forgotten their gratitude to Japan. The event is a reminder of both people’s strength and resilience.

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Background information

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some five million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA’s services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

Financial support to UNRWA has not kept pace with an increased demand for services caused by growing numbers of registered refugees, expanding need, and deepening poverty. As a result, the Agency’s General Fund (GF), supporting UNRWA’s core activities and 97 per cent reliant on voluntary contributions, has begun each year with a large projected deficit. Currently the deficit stands at US\$ 100 million.

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