



The head of UNRWA says that although the initial shortfall in its budget has been brought down by almost \$400 million, the agency for Palestinian refugees faces considerable difficulties until the end of the year, and huge budgetary challenges next year.

„The very good news is that since January 2018 we have brought the shortfall down from \$446 million to \$64 million,“ UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl said in a press conference at UNRIC in Brussels. „\$64 million is small compared to \$446 but it is still a significant amount of money that we need, but I am encouraged that there are governments who are signalling their interest in contributing further to this.“

UNRWA has an annual budget of \$1.2 billion but the United States, UNRWA´s biggest donor, has withdrawn its contribution which amounted to \$344 million last year. Earlier this year the US, however, paid \$60 million to UNRWA before ending aid to the agency.

Mr. Krähenbühl is in Brussels for meetings with senior EU officials. „Here in Brussels I want to highlight the very important leadership role that the European Union has historically played with UNRWA.“

He said that the European Union, has stepped up to this situation and announced recently in New York that it proposes to allocate an additional €40 million to UNRWA in 2018. „But of course 2019 is going to be a big challenge for us.“

Mr. Krähenbühl said that the fact that UNRWA was able to start the school year last month was not only a cause of celebration for the students and their parents but also for the host countries of Palestinian refugees, who feared that delays in the opening of schools for over 500,000 Palestinians „would create further instability in the Middle-East.“

„The positive developments are very significant, it has an impact, first and foremost, in response to the dignity of the Palestine refugees but also to a measure of stability in the region as well of course a sign that multilateralism is robust and active and alive,“ Mr. Krähenbühl said.

UNRWA provides assistance and protection to some 5.4 million Palestine refugees across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank including East Jerusalem, and Gaza. Its work depends almost entirely on voluntary contributions.