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STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE AT THE 64th SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON AGENDA 31: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST

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Here below the statement delivered by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore Apostolic Nuncio Permanent Observer of the Holy See , on 3 November 2009 at the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly before the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) on item 31: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East:

Mr. Chairman,

My Delegation would like to begin by expressing its appreciation to the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for the annual report on the works of the agency during the past year. Commissioner-General Karen Abu Zayd's report is noteworthy for two reasons: first, this is the 60th anniversary of the founding of UNRWA, and second, the past year has been exceptionally difficult for UNRWA.

My Delegation takes this occasion to express gratitude and appreciation for the six decades of service and assistance provided by UNRWA to the Palestine refugees. We also offer sincere condolences for those members of the UNWRA staff killed or injured while carrying out their duties over the last 60 years.

UNRWA was created as a temporary UN body, given the task of serving Palestine refugees until such time as their situation was justly resolved. Now, six decades later, UNRWA's very existence is a reminder that the question of Palestine refugees remains unresolved.

Mr. Chairman,

This tragic reality brings my Delegation to the second point: namely, that this report speaks of the tragedies and difficulties currently endured by the refugees just as they have been for the past six decades. The Holy See understands precisely how the current situation has impacted the lives of millions with great adversity. Working

with its worldwide donors and collaborators, the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, also founded as a temporary agency in 1949, currently provides education, health services, relief, social services and employment programs to the Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and Gaza along with UNRWA.

Mr. Chairman,

Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains key to resolving so many of the situations that bring chaos to the region of the Middle East and which have serious worldwide implications. Regrettably, there is a failure on the part of both concerned parties to engage in significant and substantive dialogue and dispute resolution in order to bring stability and peace to the Holy Land. More than ever before, the international community is needed to continue its efforts to facilitate with haste a rapprochement of the parties. Obviously, those brokering the negotiations will have to maintain a balanced approach, avoiding the imposition of preconditions on either side.

In the hope that the many problems of the region will finally be resolved by negotiation and dialogue, my Delegation further underlines that a lasting solution must include the status of the Holy City of Jerusalem. In light, too, of the numerous incidents of violence and challenges to free movement posed by the Security Wall, the Holy See renews its support for "internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the Holy Places by the faithful of all religions and nationalities" (A/RES/ES-10/2).

Finally, we repeat our call to the international community to facilitate significant negotiations between the conflicting parties. Only with a just and lasting peace – not imposed but secured through negotiation and reasonable compromise – will the legitimate aspirations of all the peoples of the Holy Land be fulfilled.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

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