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Special Coordinator  
for Lebanon

Bureau du  
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pour le Liban

**Statement of United Nations Special Coordinator Michael Williams on the occasion  
of the start of the rubble removal from the old Nahr al-Barid camp**

29 October 2008

Distinguished Excellencies, dear friends,

Allow me to express my thanks for the invitation to speak to you today, alongside Ambassador Khalil Makkawi, PLO representative Abbas Zaki and my UN colleagues, UNRWA Deputy Commissioner Filippo Grandi, my deputy Marta Ruedas, who is also the UNDP resident representative and Salvatore Lombardo, the new Head of UNRWA in Lebanon. I am very glad to have the opportunity to attend this important event today.

I have only recently taken up my duties as UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon. But, I have been following developments in Nahr al-Barid very closely since last summer's tragic events, the consequences of which remain one of the biggest challenges Palestinians, Lebanese and the international community here in Lebanon.

Standing here in the old camp of Nahr al-Barid, we are reminded of last year's fighting that claimed the lives of many, left homes destroyed and livelihoods taken away. Those most affected by the fighting are Palestinians from Nahr al-Barid – some of whom are here with us today with the hope of building new lives.

More than a year after the end of the fighting, much work has been done to provide relief to those affected by the crisis and address their immediate needs. There have also been commendable joint efforts to heal the psychological wounds of the Palestinian and Lebanese communities affected.

Important steps have been taken by the Government of Lebanon, by Palestinians themselves and by the international community to prepare for the reconstruction of the camp and the recovery of the surrounding communities. For its part, the UN system in Lebanon, which I represent here today along with my colleagues, has made "Nahr al-Barid" a priority.

We have gathered here today as the removal of rubble from the **old** Nahr al-Barid camp, once home to around 20,000 Palestinian refugees and one of Tripoli's most lively commercial centres, has finally begun. This is an important milestone on the way towards the reconstruction of Nahr al-Barid itself and the return of its inhabitants - a milestone that gives hope and signals a new beginning.

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However, the mammoth task of reconstructing the camp itself lies before us. The necessary resources to fund the reconstruction and the restoration of livelihoods have only been partially secured. The international donor conference in Vienna a few months ago was an excellent start but more needs to be done.

I therefore appeal to our partners in the international community to provide additional financial support, with a view to sharing responsibilities and enabling those affected by this crisis to live a life in dignity once again.

While we are gathered here to welcome the start of a critical phase for Nahr al- Barid, we must keep in mind progress is also required on other aspects related to the Palestinians in Lebanon. I encourage the Government of Lebanon to continue its commendable efforts aimed at improving the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in the other 11 camps throughout Lebanon. For its part, the UN is committed to supporting these efforts. I believe that an improvement in the living conditions of Palestinian refugees throughout Lebanon will positively affect relations between Palestinians and Lebanese and provide the basis for a peaceful coexistence, pending a fair and just resolution of the plight of Palestinian refugees in accordance with relevant UN resolutions.

I also welcome the steps taken by Prime Minister Siniora, PLO representative Abbas Zakki and by Lebanese leaders aimed at overcoming a difficult past and advancing Lebanese-Palestinian reconciliation. That reconciliation and the improvement in the living conditions of Palestinians are essential to promote peace and stability throughout Lebanon.

Dear friends,

The first steps to rebuild the destroyed camp of Nahr al Barid are being taken today. Much more needs to be done, not just inside this camp but also throughout the country. Let us pledge today to continue to support this important work.

Thank you very much.

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