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October 2, 2009

The Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper
Prime Minister
Langevin Block
80 Wellington St.
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Group of 78, and reflecting views strongly expressed by the Group's recent annual policy conference, I wish to urge you to maintain and augment without delay the valuable financial support which your government has provided to help Palestine refugees through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

As you know, building on a long-established multiparty tradition, Canada contributed \$15 million (Canadian) to UNRWA's core funding in each of 2007 and 2008, and in response to emergency appeals for refugees in the West Bank and Gaza an additional \$10 million in 2007, increased to \$11 million in 2008. We also provided \$2 million in both years for UNRWA's organizational reform. So far this year, no Canadian contributions have yet been announced, apart from a special pledge of \$3 million in January in the context of the Gaza situation. Although the USA and the EU (along with its member states) have fully met their commitments this year, and the USA made a supplementary emergency contribution of US\$81 million this summer, UNRWA currently faces an unprecedented shortfall of US\$16.8 million in its core budget for 2009. If not met, this is bound to affect its ability to maintain its vital education facilities for hundreds of thousands of refugee children, public health measures, and assistance to the particularly disadvantaged among the refugees, not only in the West Bank and Gaza, but also in Jordan and Lebanon. All these activities make an important contribution to social stability and provide an alternative to extremist ideologies.

We believe that deteriorating conditions in the area and among refugees warrant early action by Canada to do its part to meet this situation. Also, such action would help to avert any mistaken impression that Canada is not fully in accord with President Obama's critical efforts to move towards settlement of the Israel-Palestine issue; and it would meet any ill-informed criticism of contrast between Canada and the EU's current appeals to other countries to live up to their commitments and contribute financially to the future work of UNRWA.

Respectfully,

Richard Harmston
Chair, Board of Directors, Group of 78

/me

Cc: Michael Ignatieff, M.P., Leader, Liberal Party, Hon. Jack Layton, M.P., Leader, New Democratic Party, Gilles Duceppe, M.P., Leader, Bloc Québécois