



providing humanitarian assistance  
to palestine refugees since 1950

# BIOGRAPHY

## **UNRWA** **COMMISSIONER-** **GENERAL** **KAREN KONING** **ABUZAYD**

In August 2000, Karen AbuZayd became an Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, appointed to the post of Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. On 1 April 2005, she became the Acting Commissioner-General and the UN Secretary General appointed her to the post of Commissioner-General on 28 June 2005.

From her base in Gaza, she helps to oversee the education, health, social services and micro-enterprise programs for 4.6 million Palestine refugees. Since September 2000, her work has concentrated on providing emergency assistance to, and generating employment for, the victims of the current crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Before joining UNRWA, Karen worked for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for 19 years. She began her humanitarian career in Sudan in 1981, dealing with Ugandan, Chadian and Ethiopian refugees fleeing from war and famine in their own countries. From Sudan she moved to Namibia in 1989 to help coordinate the return of apartheid era refugees, a successful repatriation operation which led to elections and independence. A year later the Liberian civil war erupted and Karen moved to Sierra Leone to head the UNHCR office in Freetown, initiating a new emergency response that settled 100,000 Liberians in 600 villages along the Liberian/Sierra Leone border.

From 1991-93 in UNHCR's Geneva Headquarters, Karen directed the South African repatriation operation and the Kenya-Somali cross-border operation. She left Geneva to go to Sarajevo as Chief of Mission for two years during the Bosnian war. Four million displaced and war-affected people were kept alive by UNHCR's airlift and convoy activities, while thousands more were protected from ethnic cleansing by a UNHCR presence. Karen's last four years in UNHCR were spent as Chef de Cabinet to High Commissioner Sadako Ogata and as Regional Representative for the United States and Caribbean, where she focused on funding, public information and the legal issues of asylum-seekers.

Before joining UNHCR, Karen lectured in Political Science and Islamic Studies at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda and at Juba University in southern Sudan. She earned her B.Sc. at DePauw University in Indiana and her M.A. in Islamic Studies at McGill University in Canada. She has two children.

With Headquarters in Gaza and Amman, UNRWA provides education, health, and relief and social services to Palestine refugees living in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. With some 27,500 employees, mainly locally recruited teachers and health workers, UNRWA is the largest United Nations Agency in terms of staff. The Agency's 2008 General Fund budget is US\$ 545 million.

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