



BIOGRAPHY

UNRWA COMMISSIONER- GENERAL KAREN ABUZAYD

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

From her base in Gaza, she helps to oversee the education, health, social services and microfinance programmes for eligible 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, Ms AbuZayd 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 Ms AbuZayd 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, Ms AbuZayd 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. Ms AbuZayd'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, Ms AbuZayd 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.

About UNRWA:

Some 4.6 million Palestine refugees in UNRWA's five fields of operations – Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – are eligible for Agency services, including education, healthcare, social services, shelter, microcredit loans and emergency aid. UNRWA employs nearly 30,000 staff, the vast majority of whom are Palestine refugees. UNRWA's operations are financed almost entirely by voluntary contributions from donors. The Agency's regular budget for 2008-2009 is \$1.1 billion, which covers the recurrent costs of the Agency's education, health and relief and social services activities. UNRWA's headquarters are in Gaza City and Amman.

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