

Thousands run the Gaza Strip to raise funds for Palestine refugee kids

<http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=1265>

2 March 2012, Gaza

Braving cold winds, rain, and the occasional muscle cramp, close to 2,000 runners – from children to professional athletes – participated in the Gaza Marathon on 1 March, a fundraiser for Palestine refugee children in the Gaza Strip.

Launched by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) last year, the Gaza Marathon raises funds for the annual Summer Games, giving kids in Gaza a unique opportunity to play and learn with their friends, while creating memories that will last for a lifetime.

At 42 kilometres long, the entire Gaza Strip is the same length as an official marathon. From Beit Hanoun in the north to Rafah in the south, local and international runners participated in ten, 20, and 42-km races.

“For many of these athletes, reaching Gaza was an exercise in itself, with coordination taking months,” said UNRWA’s Christer Nordahl. Their determination paid off, with about 70 supporters arriving from around the world to run the marathon.

Although the weather was treacherous enough to close many schools in Gaza, it didn’t stop over 1,800 local children from joining the athletes on the route in their own three-kilometre relay.

Growing up in Gaza

Home to over 1.1 million Palestine refugees, the Gaza Strip is still surviving the many challenges created by the Israeli blockade. The isolation of Gaza has caused the unemployment rate to skyrocket to one of the highest in the world. Following the 2008-2009 Israeli military assault, rebuilding of homes and schools was stalled because of restrictions on construction material imports. With limited housing and a large and growing population, the blockade has compounded Gaza’s overcrowding problem – especially in impoverished refugee camps.

Growing up with these conditions, the Summer Games provide refugee children in Gaza with a rare chance at a normal summer.

“The children of Gaza always mesmerise me,” explained Nordahl. “They deserve these opportunities. They deserve to have what is normal for most children around the world, and for their dreams to come true.”

Our supporters

In addition to the dedicated runners who participated and raised funds, UNRWA would like to thank the Bank of Palestine, Jawwal, WorldVision, and the many other partners that helped to make the 2012 Gaza Marathon a success for the children of Gaza.

You can still donate online to support the Summer Games at www.unrwa.org/summergames

Background information

UNRWA provides assistance, protection and advocacy for nearly 5 million registered Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territory, pending a solution to their plight. The Agency's services encompass education, health care, social safety-net, camp infrastructure and improvement, community support, microfinance and emergency response, including in times of armed conflict.

UNRWA is funded almost entirely by contributions from States. The Agency's core budget for 2012-2013 stands at USD 1.33 billion. In 2012, emergency appeals for the West Bank, Gaza and Lebanon amounted to USD 344.0 million.

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