

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1410/09
by Paul van Buitenen (Verts/ALE)
to the Commission

Subject: UNWRA's Microfinance and Microenterprise Program

In January 2009, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy published the report 'Fixing UNRWA: repairing the UN's troubled system of aid to the Palestinian refugees' written by James Lindsay, who served as a senior legal advisor of UNRWA where he oversaw all of UNRWA's legal activities.

The author comments on UNRWA's Microfinance and Microenterprise Programme (MMP) in which he points out two issues:

- a) By giving out loans, the MMP programme seems to be in competition with local lenders, whereby the possibility of unfair competition arises, considering the fact that the MMP programme is heavily subsidised.
- b) The majority of loans in Syria (and perhaps in Jordan) is given out to individuals 'who were neither refugees nor Palestinians'.

As the most important contributor to UNRWA:

1. Does the Commission find it acceptable that the MMP is competing with local lenders in giving out loans?
2. Does the Commission find it acceptable that the MMP programme is giving out loans to individuals who are 'neither refugees nor Palestinians'?
3. Can the Commission specify how much of its funds have been used for the MMP programme?