

**Statement by Lynn Hastings, United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the
Occupied Palestinian Territory, on the International Day for Education
Jerusalem, 24 January 2022**

“Changing Course, Transforming Education”

Each year on 24 January, the United Nations marks International Education Day in celebration of the role of education in peace and development. The theme this year, as our world stands at a turning point, is **“Changing Course, Transforming Education”**. Gaping inequalities, a damaged planet, growing polarization and the devastating impact of the pandemic present a stark, generational choice: continue on an unsustainable path or radically change course.

In Palestine, educational achievement at all levels continues to be affected by the political situation and resulting conflict. While Palestine has one of the highest enrollment rates in the region for students in elementary education, substantial challenges to access education remain, especially for students from vulnerable groups and communities.

COVID-19 has also deeply affected education, for children with no access to digital learning opportunities. This divide is often present in remote and disadvantaged areas in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Many students lack internet access, devices, and adequate digital literacy. Less than half of households with children between the ages of 10-17 who are currently enrolled in schools have the desktop, laptop or tablet they need for remote learning.

Prolonged and intermittent school closures have also resulted in learning loss – only 37% of students attended educational classes during school closure and only an average of 64% of the curricula was covered during 2020-2021.

The 11-day escalation of Israeli-Palestinian hostilities in May 2021 aggravated existing vulnerabilities and affected children’s well-being and protection. The damage to 136 schools run by the Palestinian Authority affected 121,092 children, worsening an existing shortage of classrooms in Gaza. Sixty-five per cent of schools in Gaza operate on double or triple shifts, shortening the school day, sometimes to only 4 hours.

A reimagined future is needed to change course and transform education in Palestine. But this will only happen if there is collective support from a broad range of stakeholders: the authorities, the UN, civil society actors, educators, students and young people.

Funding education must be seen as an investment. Without remedial action, including improved support to teachers and increased financing, learning losses and school dropout will continue. We must implement UNESCO’s call for a new social contract in its November 2021 report, “Futures of Education”.

On this International Day for Education, I invite all stakeholders to reflect on how to strengthen education, including the digital transformation, as a public endeavour for the common good, in and for Palestine.