

# Scholarship Fund for Palestinian Refugee Women in Lebanon

## Background

As 'Gavel' of the Refugee Working Group (RWG), Canada has engaged in activities meant to produce tangible benefits for Palestinian refugees without prejudice to their rights and future status. A Canadian-led International Mission to Refugee Camps in Lebanon in 1997 noted the desirability of enhanced scholarship programs for Palestinian refugees. Given the severe poverty faced by the refugee community in Lebanon, Palestinian refugee students who complete secondary school find it too expensive to continue their studies. Women are at a particular disadvantage when it comes to getting access to higher education.

To meet this need, Canada worked with other donors to establish the **Scholarship Fund for Palestinian Refugee Women in Lebanon**. As a complement to its work on the Middle East Expert and Advisory Services Fund (EASF), IDRC's Middle East Unit in the Special Initiatives Division was selected to be Program Manager and Holder of the Funds.

## Objectives

The objective of the scholarship fund is to support Palestinian refugee women registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and/or the Lebanese Directorate of Refugee Affairs, in pursuit of undergraduate university degrees in Lebanon. The program also aims to ensure that women with good academic records, whose social and economic circumstances

could compel them to abandon their studies, will instead complete them.

## Achievements

The program was established in September 2000 and is expected to continue until 2010. It has already begun to foster a group of highly qualified women with skills that are needed by the Palestinian community. Their qualifications will be portable and recognized internationally, and their employment prospects greatly improved.

To date, a total of 221 students have received scholarships from the Fund and 104 students have already graduated. The awardees are undertaking studies in various fields such as sciences, mathematics, medicine and computer sciences. UNRWA provides career counselling for the women as they begin looking for employment and has also begun conducting tracer studies to follow their career paths. Since graduating, most graduates have been employed as teachers in UNRWA schools and some are working in the private sector.

## Funding

This is the main scholarship fund available for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, with the exception of a few individual country scholarships and UNRWA support to vocational training studies. The existence of this program is providing hope for many students and encouraging them to do well in

their high school exams. A total of approximately **USD 4.6 million** has been raised. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is the Fund's major donor, followed by the State of Qatar, the US Department of State, the government of Spain, the OPEC Fund for International Development, the government of France and International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

The period of study for students is four to five years and the average cost of a scholarship is US \$17,000. Each donor grant of US\$300,000 allows some 15 students to undertake university studies.

### **Management of the Fund**

**IDRC** conducted a competition in early 2000 and chose UNRWA in Lebanon to administer the fund. In order to ensure that the Palestinian community is closely involved in the administration of the Fund, an Advisory Committee made up of four Palestinian education experts and three UNRWA staff was established. The **Advisory Committee** is co-chaired by IDRC and is involved in major decisions concerning the administration of the Fund, including the setting of selection criteria and selection of scholarship recipients.

IDRC, as Program Manager, coordinates the receipt of donor contributions to the Scholarship Fund and oversees the work of UNRWA and the Advisory Committee in Lebanon. IDRC disburses funds to UNRWA and receives technical and financial reports from the Agency. It abides by the conditions of contribution agreements signed with each donor and reports to individual donors on their contributions annually.

A **Board of Governors**, composed of representatives of all donors, was established to oversee the Fund. Canada, through its Ambassador in Lebanon, chairs the Board whose function is to review the progress of the project. The Board takes most of its decisions 'virtually'. Occasional physical meetings are convened in the region to update the Board on the progress of the project.

### **For more information on the Scholarship Fund program, please contact:**

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