

*The situation for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has been one of extreme hardship and suffering since their displacement from historic Palestine in the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948. These refugees now number over 420,000. More than half continue to live in one of the dozen official United Nations' refugee camps scattered throughout Lebanon.*

Lebanon has the highest incidence of Palestinian refugees living in 'abject poverty'. The camps have no proper infrastructure and are severely overcrowded, with high levels of poverty and unemployment. Palestinians in Lebanon do not have social, civil or political rights, are restricted from accessing government health or education facilities, and have no access to public social services. Palestinian refugees are also considered foreigners in Lebanon, and are therefore forbidden to work in more than 70 trades and professions. They are not permitted to buy property outside of the refugee camps. There are constraints on their access to water, electricity, sanitation, phones and even building supplies, to discourage them from building permanent houses. Consequently, poverty, ill health and depression are widespread throughout the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon.

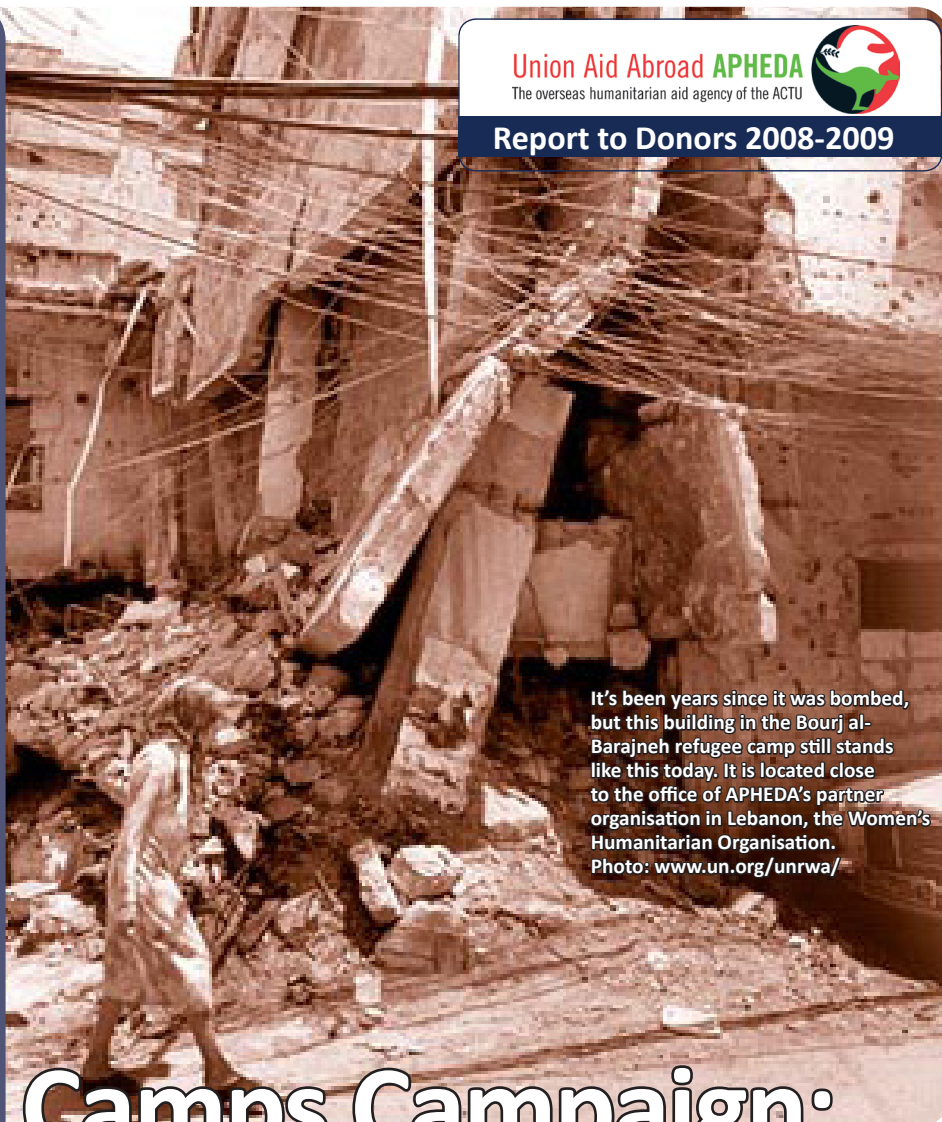
Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA's Palestinian Camps Support Campaign works with refugees living in the Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp, located on the southern outskirts of Beirut. The camp is approximately one square kilometre in size, yet houses over 20,000 people. Compare this to the population densities in the rest of Beirut (2800 people per sq. km.), Sydney (2100 per sq.km.), Melbourne (1500 per sq.km.) or Brisbane (950 per sq. km.). Many of the refugees living in Bourj al-Barajneh fled from the Galilee region of northern Palestine in 1948. They have now spent the last 61 years living as refugees.

Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA supports its long-term partner organisation in Palestine, the Women's Humanitarian Organisation, to implement the Camps Support Campaign, which provides vital health services and medical care for elderly camp residents.

Union Aid Abroad APHEDA  
The overseas humanitarian aid agency of the ACTU



Report to Donors 2008-2009



It's been years since it was bombed, but this building in the Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp still stands like this today. It is located close to the office of APHEDA's partner organisation in Lebanon, the Women's Humanitarian Organisation.  
Photo: [www.un.org/unrwa/](http://www.un.org/unrwa/)

## Camps Campaign:

### Working with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

#### Fatema's story

Fatema, 67, and her 72 year old husband live together in the Bourj al Barajneh camp. They both live with a range of health problems, and do not have any children to help support them, adding to the stress of camp life. Fatema suffers from severe diabetes and depression, while her husband was recently diagnosed with a brain tumour and is unable to move freely. Both have hypertension.

During the July 2006 Israeli war, their house, like most others in the camp, suffered extensive damage from the bombings in neighbouring areas. Most received large cracks and many are at serious risk of collapse. Through the Camps Campaign project, Fatema's home was able to be repaired, and funds set aside to cover maintenance of her small home.

Both Fatema and her husband are also helped by the APHEDA-supported elderly health and social program run by the Palestinian Women's Humanitarian Organisation. This program provides them with routine health check-ups and monitoring.

# Mohamad Al Safadi

Twenty-six year old Mohamad has Down syndrome. His elderly parents are no longer able to work, so only his sister can provide an income for the family. She is employed with a local wood-working factory, where her limited income is mostly spent on everyday essentials, especially medicines and treatments for her family.

Fortunately, Mohamad is registered in a social and mental care school for the disabled, but relies on financial support from the Camps Campaign program to pay his school fees and transport costs.



## Other activities supported by the Camps Campaign program in Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp (2008-2009):

- Medical support for 17 recipients
- Sixty elderly and disabled residents benefited from the supply of incontinence pads
- Ramadan Iftar: During the month of Ramadan, the Women's Humanitarian Organisation organises a traditional Iftar meal for 80 of the camp's elderly. The elderly are very glad to be able to share this meal with others, but even more importantly, they appreciate the Organisation's request for help from them in cooking and preparing the meal. One of the less visible effects of camp life is the social and psychological harm that is caused when living in such impoverished and uncertain circumstances. Opportunities, however small, which provide residents with the chance to contribute to their community in a meaningful way is important for their mental health and well-being. After the Iftar meal, the elderly stayed for a couple of hours to chat and talk with each other. Olfat Mahmoud from the Women's Humanitarian Organisation says "They love these occasions where they can meet in a big group."
- Al Nakba activities: Each year on May 15, the non-government organisations (NGOs) working in the camp organise a big event to commemorate Al Nakba, the 'catastrophe' of the loss of historic Palestine in 1948. It is usually the children who are most involved in these activities, but WHO ensures that the camp's elderly, as the original refugees forced to flee Palestine 61 years ago, are able to contribute by running some of the Al Nakba activities. They like to be involved by showing the local community some of the Palestinian culture through the cooking of traditional food, handicrafts, storytelling and providing information to younger people about the Palestinian culture through an oral history program.

*Thank you for your assistance to our Middle East program throughout the past financial year. Your continued support is greatly appreciated.*

Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA is the overseas humanitarian aid arm of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. We assist projects in South East Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East and southern Africa, working through partners to deliver training in vocational skills, health and workers' rights so women and men may have decent work which provides a living wage, reasonable conditions and a safe workplace. Our international program seeks to empower women and men in developing countries so they and their families might live with their human rights respected, both in their workplace and in their society.

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