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KL's help sought to ensure UN aid for Palestinians stays

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Malaysian Government's help is being sought to get the United Nations Relief and Works Agency not to rescind its aid to about 400,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Kassem Aina, director of Beit Atfal As-Samoud (Home for Children of the Steadfast) a refugee children's home in Beirut said yesterday the plight of the refugees, particularly that of their children, was getting worse.

Under a recent directive issued by the UNRWA to its employees in Lebanon, each Palestinian refugee child is required to pay for his own education from next year, Kassem said at a Press conference.

He added that another shocking development was that UNRWA will no longer reserve beds in Lebanese hospitals for Palestinians, nor will it pay 25 per cent of the cost of operations.

Describing the plight of the Palestinians, he said: "The Palestinians in Lebanon are not citizens, nor are we foreigners.

"We have no right to work except by doing the most menial tasks like cleaning homes, our children cannot enter Lebanese schools and when we need to travel, a travel document costs about RM378 and an exit-cum-re-entry permit, which is valid for six months and renewable only in Beirut, is required."

"As a result of these changes, responsibility may be shifted to the Lebanese Government which might put additional pressure on the Palestinians to migrate.

"But they have nowhere to go. The Israelis are preventing Palestinians from returning to their homeland while western countries are closing their doors to immigrants," he said.

He said that if the UNRWA directive was implemented, this would mean that the 400 Palestinian children sponsored by Malaysians (at a cost of RM1,000 per child each year) will require an additional RM90,000. Also present was Malaysian Sociological Research Institute trustee, Dr Alijah Gordon.

"We are appealing to the Malaysian Government and in particular Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to urge the UNRWA, through the UN General Assembly (of which Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the UN, Tan Sri Razali Ismail is president), not to rescind its aid to the Palestinians."

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