Colleagues,

Greetings from Beirut.

I’m standing on the roof of a building in the southern suburbs of Beirut, in the Palestinian refugee camp of Bourj el-Barajneh - a camp that has been here since 1950 – and is currently housing 30,000 Palestinian refugees, 2,000 of whom have arrived from Syria in the last year.

Behind me you can see the Bekaa Valley. I had hoped to be there today but winter has set in with a vengeance. It’s cold, it’s snowing, the roads are closed and people are desperate for shelter.

Some of you may have seen the pictures on your television screens but what I’ve been able to see is the difference that CERF funding can make. When people arrived here from Syria, they came with nothing. CERF funding helped to give them some cash assistance to get them going.

Our colleagues in UNRWA [the UN Relief and Works Agency] are doing everything they can but shelter is a major, major issue here in Beirut. The prices have gone up as more and more refugees have entered the country. And even though I am here standing in what is called a refugee camp, in reality it’s an urban setting where people are crowded into narrow apartments. As you will have seen from the information that we provided to you, the majority of Syrian refugees, even here in Lebanon, are living not in camps but in host families and host communities, which are really feeling the strain.

That’s why CERF funding is so important. It’s about kick-starting that major effort. You saw at the beginning of this film the family in the Bekaa Valley who are desperate to go home. They can’t because of the violence, the intimidation, the brutality that is happening inside Syria right now.

Syria and neighbouring countries have been the biggest recipients of CERF funding in the last year - US$82 million overall; $21 million in Lebanon itself. CERF really does make a difference. I’m seeing it here in Lebanon, we have seen it in Syria, we have seen it in Jordan - we have seen it all over the world. And I hope that today, during our pledging conference, you will continue to give generously to help CERF over the next year.

Thank you.