



With breaking stories and  
newswire products from

**UN NEWS CENTRE**



## **Visit to UN Headquarters caps off week-long trip for some of Gaza's top students**



First graders at a UNRWA-run Elementary School in Gaza City participating in stress-relieving games and activities

25 January 2010 – Fifteen young female students from the Gaza Strip capped off a trip of a lifetime today at United Nations Headquarters in New York, the final stop on a week-long visit to the United States they received for their achievements in a human rights education programme run by the world body.

The visit to New York, including today's meeting with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, followed stops in Atlanta, where they met with former US President Jimmy Carter at the

Carter Center, as well as Washington D.C., for visits to the White House and other national monuments.

The group, which included 15 Palestinian eighth graders and three of their teachers, are the top achievers in the human rights, conflict resolution and tolerance programme taught in Gaza by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (**UNRWA**).

The agency operates one of the largest school systems in the Middle East, with nearly 700 schools, and has been the main provider of primary education to Palestine refugees for 60 years.

Education is UNRWA's largest programme, accounting for more than half of the agency's regular budget, and one of its key projects promotes non-violent communication skills, conflict resolution, human rights and tolerance.

The trip to the US is the first time these girls have ever been outside Gaza in their lives.

Tasneem Al-Ashquar, who wants to be a doctor someday, said she was very proud to be able to come to the US. "There are a lot of other students, especially college students, who wish to come to the US for studying but the siege is stopping them," the 15-year-old told the UN News Centre.

Asked what she liked best about the human rights programme, she said: "I liked that I could speak my mind and give a voice to the suffering of the people of Gaza."

Another student, Tasneem Al-Lulu, said that in addition to learning about her basic human rights, she learned a lot about how African-Americans were able to achieve their rights in a peaceful and non-violent way.

"The most interesting thing for me was respect... here all people respect each other," she stated.

Meeting the Secretary-General was the highlight of the trip for Bara Abu Shawish, who described the UN chief as "a very important man and very nice. I want to thank him for all he is doing to help us."

An identical group of boys will be following the same itinerary this week, ending up in New York next Monday.

### **News Tracker: past stories on this issue**

Conflict over but situation of Gaza's children still 'precarious' – UNICEF