



[UNRWA Funding Cuts Hinder Vital Humanitarian Assistance in Gaza](#)

Israel has accused approximately a dozen United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) employees of being involved in the October 7th Hamas attacks. UNRWA immediately fired nine employees and launched an investigation in an attempt to mitigate the blowback from these accusations. The UN Secretary-General confirmed that the investigation was independent, and that the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services is involved. However, since these accusations surfaced, 18 donor countries – Australia, Austria, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States – have removed their funding for the aid agency. Many of these countries were among UNRWA’s top donors in 2022, and account for over three-quarters of the organization’s funding. UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini was shocked that there was such a harsh response to the alleged actions of a miniscule group of staff. The accusations were seen by some as a political move that came just a day after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling which required Israel to restore provisions and aid to Palestinians in the face of the destructive War on Gaza. It also takes place at a particularly troubling time, as civilians in Gaza are in desperate need of relief services which UNRWA is a vital source of providing.

Even prior to the ongoing War on Gaza, 80% of Palestinian civilians there were reliant on humanitarian aid resources, according to UN reports. The over 2 million people in the besieged enclave depend on this now more than ever, as the war and mass citizen displacement continue. It is estimated that around 1 million Gazans, approximately 45% of the population there, have been sheltering in UNRWA schools, clinics, and other public buildings. Human Rights Watch has also highlighted how UNRWA provides critical services for millions of Palestinians such as food, water, shelter, education, and health care. UNRWA employs over 30,000 Palestinians, 13,000 of whom work in Gaza, making it a large organization with an important mobilization capacity. In light of the recent developments, a spokesperson for UNRWA stated that they would be forced to cease their operations due to a lack of resources if funding was not restored by the end of February.

Observers have noted that there is no evidence of institutional collusion between Hamas and UNRWA, and that the few accused workers merely have jobs with the latter organization. The fact that only 0.09% of UNRWA employees in Gaza are being accused of any wrongdoing should demonstrate the absurdity of impugning the entire organization and hindering its vital work to deliver much-needed humanitarian services. The assistance is not possible without the foreign aid that UNRWA receives, as the organization relies heavily on donor contributions from UN member states, which account for nearly 90% of their overall funding. The cuts to UNRWA funding are an immoral form of collective punishment, and regrettably impede the efforts to provide aid where it is desperately needed. Doing so will only exacerbate an already dire humanitarian crisis, and lead to more suffering and animosity.

The sheer notion that all of the accused employees were bad actors itself remains suspect. The confessions and underlying intelligence regarding them were obtained through various methods of torture and unlawful detainment which, according to the National Health Institute, tends to make confessions unreliable. Israeli authorities’ use of such abusive practices is well-known amongst international watchdog organizations, who point out that it provides poor actionable intelligence. Confessions like these are not only unreliable, but they are also

unethical as well. Israel's actions in its War on Gaza have been littered with credible allegations of human rights violations being committed, including the recent discovery of dozens of tortured victims' bodies in a school in Gaza, and thus it does not come as a surprise to many that abusive methods are utilized in information gathering as well.

To mitigate the massive ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, countries who have suspended funding for the UNRWA should reinstate their donations. This is especially important considering that some of these nations are directly contributing to the suffering in Gaza through unwavering military and arms assistance to Israel. At the very least, it is paramount that aid agencies like UNRWA receive the support that they need to carry out their essential and impartial humanitarian work. The Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Doctors Without Borders, and 21 different humanitarian organizations have called on donors to not suspend their crucial funding. It is unconscionable that thousands of civilians, through no fault of their own, should be left to suffer due to the purported actions of a few individuals.