



[The Unsubstantiated Allegations Behind Israeli Efforts to Shut Down UNRWA](#)

Following Israel's allegations that several UNRWA workers were involved in the October 7th Hamas attacks, sixteen donor countries have cut their funding to the organization. However, even before these allegations arose, UNRWA has long been the target of many Israeli hardliners who wish to see the organization defunded and disbanded. It is no secret that Israeli officials have harbored ill will toward UNRWA and its mission. They have made inflammatory claims that UNRWA schools supported terrorism by teaching young Palestinians to hate Israel and support Hamas. Before the onset of Israel's War on Gaza, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described UNRWA as "an organization that perpetuates the problem of Palestinian refugees [and] the narrative of the right of return, so to speak, with the aim of eliminating the state of Israel, and therefore UNRWA should be removed from the world." Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and others have been complicit in this by cutting essential funding to the organization, effectively gutting UNRWA's capability to continue aiding the besieged civilians of Gaza. Without the financial support, UNRWA reports that they will be unable to continue operations past the end of February. Those who have tried to derail the organization have not offered a possible alternative to the critical work that UNRWA does, which includes its facilitating of many basic services for Palestinians. This was already the case prior to the ongoing Gaza War, and has since become even more pivotal in the face of the worsening humanitarian crisis that has been brought on by the destructive conflict. Shutting down UNRWA would also be a huge blow to other humanitarian aid organizations operating in the region, who rely on it for the coordination and organization of delivering services to civilians in need. Earlier this week, UK broadcaster Channel 4 News debunked Israel's allegations against UNRWA, finding that there was no evidence to back the harmful and controversial claims.

One of UNRWA's missions is taking care of Palestinian refugees who have been forcibly displaced by Israel from their ancestral homes, and paving the way for their right of return under international human rights law. The mission seeks to return families who might have been displaced multiple generations beforehand. In this way, UNRWA is both a literal and symbolic obstacle to Israeli interests, serving as a constant reminder that the Palestinian people were forcefully removed from their homes. Thus, many Israeli hardliners seek to remove the refugee status of Palestinians, and in doing so, eliminate their right of return to areas that they were forcibly displaced from upon the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the years that followed.

By defunding UNRWA, Israel is ultimately hoping that the organization be disbanded, in essence sweeping the issue of refugee return under the rug. For UNRWA opponents, dismantling it would help to both diminish the issue of Palestinian refugee status and further acceptance of forcible Palestinian resettlement. The efforts to delegitimize UNRWA's work also clearly have political motivations, evidenced by the fact that the allegations against some of its workers came in the immediate aftermath of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling against Israel for its abusive actions in Gaza, which ordered Israel to take provisional measures including humanitarian improvements. For many impartial analysts, the allegations towards UNRWA were a blatant attempt to deflect attention away from the ICJ ruling backlash and spurn responsibility for fulfilling the ICJ's provisional measures.

Observers have also highlighted the belief that Israel is attempting to create conditions in which Palestinians will voluntarily migrate and find suitable living conditions elsewhere, essentially ridding Israel of potential returnees to their generational homes. Israel's targeting of humanitarian assistance to Gaza lends to the goal of pushing Palestinians out. Israeli officials from multiple parties have supported the idea of voluntary migration, encouraging an exodus of Palestinians to other countries. By trying to frame the migrations as "voluntary," Israel is skirting around forcefully transferring the Palestinian population, which is considered a war crime. Bigoted Israeli ministers such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich have argued for this, abhorrently claiming that removing Palestinians would make Israel safer and "ease Palestinian suffering." Inflammatory statements like these make it clear that for many Israeli hardliners, the underlying aim is to continue illegally occupying land and displacing more Palestinians from their homes. By cutting funding to UNRWA, other governments are complicit in helping intolerant Israeli officials try to achieve these goals. Several years ago, back in 2018, then-U.S. President Donald Trump's administration cut all U.S. funding for the vital humanitarian aid organization, drawing criticism from rights activists. Aid to UNRWA was eventually reinstated in 2021 under President Biden, but we now once again find governments withdrawing financial backing in the name of Israeli hardline interests, instead of seeing the allegations against UNRWA for their glaring and cynical nature.