



To:
President of the European Council
President of the European Commission
High Representative V.P. Borrell
European Commissioner Várhelyi
European Commissioner Lenarčič

02 February 2024

Subject: Immediate revision financial freeze of UNRWA funds by EU member states needed.

Your Excellencies,

We are addressing you with a pressing sense of urgency and persistent concern regarding the disastrous humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories - particularly Gaza, to urge that the decision by some EU member states to freeze funding to UNRWA be immediately reversed.

For more than 75 years, the United Nations Relief Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has played a pivotal role in ensuring basic services and goods for Palestinian refugees. Today the Gaza strip accounts for eight refugee camps, designated for over 1.2 million Palestinians.¹ The Occupied West Bank accounts for 19 official refugee camps and 871,537 registered refugees.² These figures exclude the UNRWA camps and assistance in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. The importance and services of this organization must therefore not be underestimated and are needed now more than ever.

It disheartened us to observe several EU member states abruptly halt their funding to this crucial UN agency. This measure compromises its thousands of staff, expertise, access, and most of all the serious responsibility of assisting the Palestinian people, who are in dire need of life-saving aid.³ In the past hundred days, almost ninety percent (90%) of the Gazan population, including the official registered refugees, have been forcibly displaced, while entire districts and health facilities have been turned to rubble under heavy Israeli airstrikes.⁴ More than one percent of the Gazan population and numerous bloodlines have been killed in only a few months.⁵ Diseases are spreading, while the few hospitals left 'functional', are unable to treat the injured and ill. Various international organizations such as the WHO have warned several times about deteriorating and dangerous situations that could be averted if assistance is increased, and access granted to the Gaza Strip.⁶

Simultaneously, our colleagues in parliament have witnessed the long trails of aid convoys that are waiting for weeks to enter the Gaza Strip from Egypt. During the early stages of the war, H.E. Prime Minister Alexander De Croo of Belgium and H.E. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez of Spain witnessed the same scenes.⁷

¹ <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip>

² <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/britain-italy-finland-pause-funding-un-refugee-agency-gaza-2024-01-27/>

⁴ <https://www.hr.org/news/2023/12/20/most-gazas-population-remains-displaced-and-harms-way>

⁵ <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-war-news-01-21-2024-02caafa092668ecc7ff122229c166807#>

⁶ <https://www.who.int/news/item/21-12-2023-lethal-combination-of-hunger-and-disease-to-lead-to-more-deaths-in-gaza>

⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spains-pm-sanchez-current-ceasefire-gaza-not-enough-we-need-permanent-ceasefire-2023-11-24/>

On Friday, January 26, 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered six provisional measures in the case brought by South Africa alleging Israel's violations of its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.⁸ Specifically, under provisional measure four (4), the Court ruled that the State of Israel should "take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza strip".⁹ These are minimum obligations for any occupying power, which also stem from international humanitarian law and the applicable Geneva Conventions.

The allegations put forward by the Israeli government against UNRWA regarding the alleged involvement of its staff in the Hamas terror attacks of October 7, 2023, deserve very serious consideration. We welcome and support in that regard, the UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini's immediate action to terminate the contracts of the allegedly involved staff, including the launched external investigation, until all accounts are verified.¹⁰

At the same time, we believe that the reported alleged actions of certain individuals do not warrant the collective punishment of a reputable UN organization, consequently affecting the well-being, essential life structures and necessities of more than 2 million Palestinian civilians in Gaza, who are forced to defy inhumane conditions on the ground.

We therefore call upon your wise leadership and on all EU member states to revise their decisions regarding the financial assistance of UNRWA immediately. The ruling of the ICJ is binding and one that must be respected. The EU should act upon the morals and values that it always has promoted worldwide. In alignment with the principles outlined in Article 6 of Union law, we also seek to adhere to its spirit.

The Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere are counting on all of us, not only to help end this war, but also to help provide them with the most basic services any human being deserves. Instead of halting funds, the EU must increase funds and assistance during one of the most difficult times thus far, for the Palestinian people.

Sincerely,

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4. Billy Kelleher (Renew Europe)
5. Soraya Rodríguez Ramos (Renew Europe)
6. Karen Melchior (Renew Europe)
7. Irena Joveva (Renew Europe)
8. Salima Yenbou (Renew Europe)
9. Abir Al-Sahlan (Renew Europe)
10. Georgios Kyrtos (Renew Europe)
11. Klemen Grošelj (Renew Europe)
12. Monica Semedo (Renew Europe)
13. Thijs Reuten (S&D)
14. Mohammed Chahim (S&D)
15. Evin Incir (S&D)

⁸ <https://apnews.com/article/israel-gaza-genocide-court-south-africa-27cf84e16082cde798395a95e9143c06#>

⁹ <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/serious-allegations-against-unrwa-staff-gaza-strip>

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19. Carina Ohlsson (S&D)
20. Pascal Durand (S&D)
21. Pierre Larrourou (S&D)
22. Isabel Santos (S&D)
23. Giuliano Pisapia (S&D)
24. Milan Brglez (S&D)
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