

# **Urgent global appeal: Defend UNRWA from Israeli ban and prevent catastrophic consequences for Palestinians**

26 October 2024

We call on world leaders to act urgently to protect UNRWA from the unprecedented and dangerous attacks it faces from the Israeli Government. The Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee passed two bills on 6 October 2024 aimed at ceasing UNRWA's operations. These bills await final readings in the Knesset Plenum as soon as 28 October 2024. This could see UNRWA evicted from premises it has held for over 70 years and have its immunities revoked, severely blocking its ability to provide essential services such as healthcare and education to millions of Palestine refugees. This reckless move threatens to dismantle the backbone of the international humanitarian operation in Gaza, aggravating an already catastrophic crisis.

These bills seek to ban UNRWA from operating in areas under Israeli control, which would lead to the closure of its offices in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT). The proposed legislation would also terminate the agreement between Israel and UNRWA from 1967 in which Israel committed to facilitating UNRWA's work. This will effectively paralyse the agency's ability to fulfil its mandate as set out by the UN General Assembly in 1949.

Dismantling UNRWA would be catastrophic for Palestinians especially in Gaza and the West Bank as they are deprived of essentials such as food, water, medical aid, education and protection. It will also have catastrophic consequences for millions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria where essential humanitarian aid is crucial for both the refugees and the host communities.

These actions are part of the wider strategy of the Government of Israel to delegitimise UNRWA, discredit its support for Palestine refugees, and undermine the international legal framework protecting their rights, including the right of return. If passed, these laws will severely impact not only UNRWA's operations but also the rights of Palestinian refugees.

If these proposed laws proceed, they will have devastating operational and legal impacts on UNRWA's ability to provide services in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in Gaza. These laws will not only harm the refugees who rely on UNRWA but also jeopardise the agency's personnel many of whom have been killed by Israeli attacks, and the ability of other UN and humanitarian agencies to operate. Contrary to claims of concern over UNRWA's neutrality, the real intent appears to be, in part, to undermine its efforts to uphold the status of Palestine refugees and obstruct a future political resolution.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has ordered Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts within the scope of Article II of the Genocide Convention. By blocking UNRWA's operations, Israel is disregarding the ICJ provisional measure to ensure the delivery of life-saving aid into Gaza. The ICJ stated in March 2024 that: "In conformity with its obligations under the Genocide Convention, and in view of the worsening conditions of life faced by Palestinians in Gaza, in particular the spread of famine and starvation, Israel shall: (a) take all necessary and effective measures to ensure, without delay, in full co-operation with the United Nations, the unhindered provision at scale by all concerned of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance". According to human rights groups, halting UNRWA's services is part and parcel of the Israeli authorities' unlawful siege of the Gaza Strip, which amounts to the war crimes of collective punishment and the use of starvation as a weapon of war.

There is no viable alternative to UNRWA. UNRWA's essential and irreplaceable role in supporting Palestine refugees cannot be overstated. With a mandate from the UN General Assembly since 1949, UNRWA provides crucial services such as education, healthcare, and social support to millions of refugees. The idea of dismantling or undermining this agency is not only an affront to the values of multilateralism, but it also sets a dangerous precedent with global implications. Unilaterally tearing up UNRWA's mandate would challenge the integrity of the international system, undermining the trust that underpins cooperative global governance.

We demand that world leaders use all diplomatic means to prevent this legislation from advancing. They must stand against Israel's illegal actions and uphold the principles of the UN General Assembly Resolution on the ICJ Advisory Opinion (ICJ AO).

This is not a time for silence—it is a call to action. The global community must intervene now before more Palestinians are killed. The people of Gaza cannot endure further delays. Immediate, decisive action is needed to safeguard their rights, uphold their dignity, and enforce the recent International Court of Justice advisory opinion, which ruled Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory as unlawful. The future of millions of Palestinians is at stake, and the world must act without hesitation.

### **Signatories:**

ActionAid

ABCD Bethlehem

Action for Humanity

Amos Trust

Asamblea de Cooperación por la Paz

ATELIER ONGD (Valencia, Spain)

Caabu (Council for Arab-British Understanding)

Children Not Numbers

Christian Aid

Colectivo CALA (Extremadura, Spain)

COODECyL (Castilla y León Platform of Cooperation Organizations)

Coordinadora Andaluza de ONGD

Coordinadora Cántabra de ONGD

Coordinadora de ONGD Castilla La Mancha

Coordinadora de ONGD de Canarias (CONGDCA)

Coordinadora de ONGD de La Rioja

Coordinadora de ONGD de Navarra

Coordinadora Extremeña de ONGD  
Coordinadora Galega de ONG para o Desenvolvemento  
Coordinadora Valenciana de ONGD  
DanChurchAid  
Embrace the Middle East  
Euskadiko GGKEen Koordinakundea  
Federación Aragonesa de Solidaridad  
FONSA  
Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS)  
Global Justice Now  
Humanity & Inclusion - Handicap International  
Human Rights Watch  
INTERSOS  
Johanniter International Assistance  
La Coordinadora de Organizaciones para el Desarrollo - Spain  
Lafede.cat – Organitzacions per a la Justícia Global  
Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights  
Medico International  
Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP)  
Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)  
Middle East Children’s Alliance  
Movimiento Extremeño por la Paz  
Movimiento Por la Paz - MPDL  
Médicos del Mundo España  
NOVACT Institute for Nonviolence  
Norwegian People’s Aid  
Oxfam



Quakers in Britain

Sabeel-Kairos UK

Sodepaz

The Huauquipura Association

United Against Inhumanity

War Child

War on Want

Welfare Association