

PHROC Calls on Remaining Third States to immediately and Urgently Fund UNRWA to Prevent Famine and the Genocidal Destruction of the Palestinian People

The Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC) warns that Palestinians in Gaza are currently experiencing catastrophic hunger, and are on the verge of a completely avoidable man-induced famine, engineered by Israel as a weapon of war to destroy the Palestinian people. Crippled by 16-years of a punitive military siege and blockade, even prior to October 7th, Gaza was already de-developed to the point of dysfunction, with [over one million](#) people dependent on food aid for survival. Since March, due to Israel's genocidal policies and implementation of a total siege in North Gaza, and the denial of life-saving aid into the territory, at least 28 children have died from [malnutrition](#) and dehydration — adding their number to the 33,207 Palestinians killed since October 7th. UNICEF [warns](#) that this number will likely rise should Israel's assault on Gaza continue and obstacles it has imposed on humanitarian aid remain. Full resourcing of [UNRWA](#) is urgently needed to provide for the survival of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

UNRWA operates under the principle of [neutrality](#), meaning that “humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature”. UNRWA is the “[backbone](#)” of humanitarian assistance in Gaza, as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres describes. It plays, as EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, [Josep Borrell Fontelles](#) explains, an “irreplaceable role as lifeline for the strained civilians in Gaza and provides indispensable support to the Palestinians of the whole region”.

For years, Israel has attempted to systematically destroy UNRWA as part of its annexationist settler colonial objective to prevent the right of return of the Palestinian people. [Seventy percent](#) of Palestinians in Gaza are refugees denied the right of return to their homes in Israel. Israel's political leaders have [castigated](#) and smeared UNRWA with malicious claims of “perpetuat[ing] the Palestinian refugee problem” and “teach[ing] children to hate Israel”. In 2018 Israeli Prime Minister [Netanyahu](#) called for UNRWA to be “dismantled”. Also in 2018, United States President Trump halted funding to UNRWA, with US Ambassador to the United Nations, [Nikki Haley](#) stating, “we have to look at [the] right of return” of classified Palestinian refugees. More recently, Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs, [Israel Katz](#) attacked UNRWA as “part of the Palestinian lie that there are ‘refugees’ who need to return to the State of Israel. We are working to remove UNRWA

from Gaza”. On 2 February, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [reported](#) that “[UNRWA] is self-perpetuating also in its desire to keep alive the Palestinian refugee issue. And we need to get other U.N. agencies and other aid agencies replacing UNRWA if we’re going to solve the problem of Gaza as we intend to do”.

Israel has taken both military and political actions to target and eliminate UNRWA. In February, Israel’s Minister of Finance, [Bezalel Smotrich](#) blocked four shipments of flour from being transferred to UNRWA in Gaza. Between 7 October and 7 April, [178 UNRWA](#) staff members were killed in attacks across Gaza, and 161 UNRWA installations, many housing the forcibly displaced Palestinian population, were damaged. On the same day that the International Court of Justice awarded provisional measures against Israel for plausibly committing genocide in Gaza, accusations were published against UNRWA staff, who were immediately fired [without due process](#) on [secret evidence](#) on allegations which later turned out to be [unsubstantiated](#). A Channel 4 [investigation](#) into Israel’s meagre six-page dossier of allegations against UNRWA workers, found that it “contains no evidence”. Despite this, 20 States suspended and withdrew vital funding to UNRWA. These included Australia, Austria, Canada, Estonia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The allegations were clearly aligned to deflect attention from Israel’s loss at the International Court of Justice and destroy UNRWA as a continuing settler colonial objective.

In March, UNRWA warned that it would run out of funding at the end of [May 2024](#). While some Third States including [Australia](#), Austria, [Canada](#), Denmark [Finland](#), France, [Iceland](#), [Japan](#) and [Sweden](#) and the [United States](#) have begun to reinstate their funding to UNRWA — many more States have yet to follow — including Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Romania, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. On 25 March, [Germany](#) reinstated its regional funding for UNRWA, however it deliberately excluded Gaza.

The situation in Gaza has deteriorated catastrophically. On March 6, South Africa filed an [application](#) for additional provisional measures before the International Court of Justice in its genocide case against Israel, invoking the widespread starvation in Gaza, which is spreading at an unprecedented rate. In recent days, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths warned that Israel’s “decision to block its food convoys to the north only pushes thousands closer to famine” and urged full support for UNRWA — “the beating heart of the humanitarian response in Gaza”.

We urge the remaining States, to resume funding UNRWA immediately.

State Obligations to Prevent Genocide

We remind Third States that in the event of a breach of a peremptory norm of international law, which includes the prohibition against genocide, they are under the obligation not to recognise the illegal situation arising from the breach, nor to render assistance in maintaining the illegal situation, and to collaborate towards ending the illegal situation. Furthermore, under Article VIII of the 1948 [Genocide Convention](#), States Parties “may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide”.

We further remind Third States, who do have the ability to alleviate the sufferings of the Palestinian people, including through funding UNRWA, that [history](#) harshly judges those who stand by during genocide. Suspending such funding is tantamount to condemning millions of Palestinians to die of hunger, dehydration and disease. Such actions may amount to complicity in the ongoing genocide as it entrenches conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction of the Palestinian people.

In light of the above, we call on Third States to immediately and urgently continue funding UNRWA and to take concrete steps to bring the genocide to an end.