



وزارة الخارجية والمغتربين
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates
State of Palestine

Statement

The State of Palestine expresses its shock and dismay at the punitive measures announced in recent days by several States against the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). These harmful decisions come not only in a time of unprecedented crisis for Palestine refugees, but in the midst of a humanitarian catastrophe being suffered by all the Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip, for whom UNRWA has literally been the only lifeline.

The decision by some countries to suspend funding to UNRWA in response to allegations by Israel, the occupying Power, concerning the actions of a few staff members is tantamount to the collective punishment of the entire Palestine refugee population who depend on UNRWA for healthcare, education, emergency relief and other essential humanitarian services.

Such collective punishment is unlawful and unjust and will have grave implications for the nearly 6 million Palestine refugees across the Agency's five fields of operation and for the stability of the host countries. The impact will be most grave on the over 2 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip who have turned to UNRWA for emergency shelter and the minimal necessities for human survival in the face of the horrors inflicted on them by Israel in now 114 days of genocidal assault and siege that have caused massive civilian casualties, destruction, displacement, destitution, starvation and spread of disease.

Such punitive measures violate obligations under international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and directly violate the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 26 January 2024 and could amount to grave violations of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in themselves. All States party to the Genocide Convention are reminded of the binding legal obligations to respect and ensure respect of the order by the ICJ, including to stop with immediate effect any acts that create physical or mental harm to the population as well as to ensure urgently needed humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in Gaza.

These decisions are cruel and unconscionable in the face of such colossal human suffering and despair. They risk the halt of UNRWA services, which would compound the already-heightened risk to the lives of millions of vulnerable civilians, including 1.1 million children in Gaza who have already suffered unimaginable losses and traumas. We appeal governments that have made these decisions to reconsider their support as a matter of urgency and humanity, echoing the call of the UN Secretary-General to guarantee the continuity of UNRWA's critical operations, while underscoring the swift and responsible measures already undertaken by UNRWA in response to the allegations and the immediate launch by of a UN investigation to ensure accountability. This mechanism must be respected and enabled to ensure justice.



وزارة الخارجية والمغتربين
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates
State of Palestine

In this regard, we must draw attention to the fact that this comes at a time when even UNRWA schools and facilities sheltering more than 1.7 million displaced Palestinians have come under Israeli attack and at least 152 UNRWA staff have been killed in Israeli bombardments, for which there have been no investigations and no accountability. The State of Palestine thus reiterates its standing demands for independent investigations and full accountability for all the war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocidal acts perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people. Selective accountability cannot be tolerated or justified.

Sanctioning UNRWA on the basis of allegations that are yet uncorroborated and depriving it of funding for its vital humanitarian mission only serve Israel's decades-long malicious campaign against UNRWA. It is a fact well-known that Israel has for years been inciting against UNRWA attempting to libel and discredit it with the ultimate aim of dismantling it as a means to negate the Palestine refugee question and the inalienable rights of the refugees, including to return, as enshrined in General Assembly resolution 194 (II) and in accordance with international law. Such attempts must be firmly rejected and the longstanding principled and desperately-needed support to UNRWA must be maintained and strengthened, in line with the reaffirmations of support by the overwhelming majority of the international community, as reflected, among others, in recent General Assembly resolutions and in the Declarations of the 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The State of Palestine expresses its deep appreciation for the principled positions of all donors that have reaffirmed their support to UNRWA in the face of this crisis, and urges all responsible States to stand by UNRWA and its trusted leadership and to increase funding at this time of unprecedented crisis and tragedy as a reflection of solidarity and humanity. This is the time to stand by the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees, not let them down.

END

29/01/2024