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**Human rights situation in Palestine and other
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Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[27 January 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Requesting That The U.N. End Unrwa's Mandate For Its Role In Acts Of Terrorism

1. INTRODUCTION

On October 7, 2023, Hamas militants crossed into Israel from Gaza and killed over 1,200 Israeli civilians and took approximately 250 hostages.(1) Many of the women killed or taken as hostage by Hamas were mutilated or brutally raped.(2) Video footage of the attack at a kibbutzim showed Hamas terrorists shooting residents and setting fires to homes.(3) It came to light that workers for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) actively took part in the heinous attacks against Israel.(4) In fact, it has been reported that as many as 1,200 UNRWA staffers have ties to Hamas.(5) Many of the 250 hostages are still being held captive, and Hamas is still actively attacking Israel. And, although all of these facts have been proven and brought before this body, UNRWA is not being held accountable for participating in these acts of terrorism.

2. BACKGROUND

Roughly 90 of the 250 hostages taken are still being held captive by Hamas, almost a year and a half after being taken.(6) Many of these hostages are no longer alive, and with each passing day the chance of survival for those remaining diminishes.(7) Additionally, Israel has continuously been placed in a position to defend itself from the perpetual rocket attacks by Hamas against the Israeli homeland. It is more than apparent to the world that the only hope of peace is for Israel to dismantle the vicious terrorist organization, while also attempting to rescue the hostages.(8) Incredibly, amidst numerous reports of UNRWA's longtime involvement in terrorism against Israel, the UN has still not taken measures against UNRWA, which is infested with violence and antisemitism. The firing of nine UNRWA employees was not enough as there are many more UNRWA staffers who were/are working with Hamas and other armed groups against Israel.(9) UNRWA has been long intertwined with Hamas, and that connection continued through and after the fateful October 7 attack. For this reason, nine countries including the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, Italy, Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, have suspended funding for UNRWA.(10) For the United Nations—an international body whose purpose is to promote peace and justice—to continue to turn a blind eye to the evil that has crept into one of its own agencies is reprehensible. It is past time to accept responsibility and take action to end the corruption that runs rampant in UNRWA.

3. VIOLATIONS

In January 2024, Israel presented evidence that a dozen UNRWA employees played a role in the October 7, 2023, attack or the events proceeding thereafter.(11) One individual was alleged to have been involved in the kidnapping of a woman, one was said to have been handing out ammunition, and another was alleged to have been involved in the attack on a kibbutz where ninety-seven people were massacred.(12)

After the recent release of three hostages, as a result of the ceasefire deal, it has come to light that the three hostages had been held at an UNRWA camp.(13) In November 2023, it was reported that one of the Israelis Hamas took hostage was being held for fifty days in the attic of an UNRWA teacher.(14) While being held, the hostage was barely provided with any food or medical attention.(15) It was also reported that same month that an UNRWA warehouse was being used as a Hamas rocket launching site.(16) This strongly supports that UNRWA staffers were working with Hamas, or at the very least, aiding and cooperating with its efforts.

In June and October of 2017, a Hamas terror tunnel was discovered underneath two Gaza schools operated by UNRWA.(17) According to the UN Board of Inquiry, these schools were also hiding places for weapons.(18) The Board further added that the premises could

have been used for an unknown period of time by members of a Palestinian armed group, and that it was likely that such a group may have fired a mortar from the school.(19)

In 2015, UNRWA staff were suspended for inciting antisemitic and anti-Israel violence.(20) The UNRWA-run schools have used books issued by Hamas, which contain explicit antisemitic pieces and called for the destruction of Israel.(21) Materials also included poems glorifying the rejection of a peaceful ceasefire,(22) grammar exercises saying that Palestinians “sacrifice their blood to liberate Jerusalem,”(23) and chemistry books requiring students to analyze the chemicals in a phosphorous bomb supposedly dropped by Israel.(24) By taking such an explicitly antisemitic stance in its schools, UNRWA has further violated the principle of remaining neutral.

On October 4, 2004, UNRWA Commissioner-General, Peter Hansen, openly admitted to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) that UNRWA employs members of Hamas. He said: “Oh, I am sure that there are Hamas members on the UNRWA payroll . . . and I don’t see that as a crime.”(25) Numerous Palestinians employed by UNRWA have been arrested for involvement in terrorist activities.(26)

Israel is being accused of committing genocide for defending itself from attacks from Hamas who massacred and abducted innocent Israeli citizens. Meanwhile, UNRWA officials who participated in such heinous acts are given a slap on the wrist by simply getting fired from their jobs, a consequence which is often given for minor administrative infractions. This double standard has created an atmosphere of impunity for terrorist groups and those affiliated with such groups.

While only one UN organization, the UNHCR, handles the rest of the world’s refugees—those who are running from many war torn places and persecution by groups like ISIS—Palestinian “refugees” are given special treatment by having a separate and personal organization, UNRWA.

This double standard and the lack of accountability for previous criminal conduct has encouraged UNRWA officials to continue their criminal activities. Yet, they do not face consequences that other criminals face. This must stop. It is for these reasons that UNHCR, which deals with all the world’s refugees, should oversee Palestinian refugees instead of a separate organization, UNRWA.

4. REQUEST

UNRWA and its staff members must be held fully accountable for their role in the October 7, 2023, attack against innocent Israeli civilians. Instead of only getting fired from their jobs, they must be held criminally responsible for committing war crimes. Even after serious reports of UNRWA staff’s involvement in war crimes, and only a handful of UNRWA staff being fired from their jobs for such involvement, the recent report about the three hostages being kept at an UNRWA camp is not only disturbing, but it shows how deeply UNRWA is involved in such activities and that the UN is not taking any measures to control UNRWA. Clearly, UNRWA has not been living up to its mandate to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. UNRWA has engaged and cooperated with Hamas to attack Israel and kill innocent civilians, therefore, the UN must immediately discontinue UNRWA’s mandate.

Additionally, although Israel and Hamas have recently reached a ceasefire agreement and Hamas has released three hostages, the UN should do everything in its power to assist in the resolution of the enduring hostage crisis in Gaza, which would significantly help bring an end to the hostilities in the region.

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- (2) Sam Mednick, New Signs Emerge of “Widespread” Sexual Crimes by Hamas, as Netanyahu Alleges Global Indifference, AP (Dec. 6, 2023).
- (3) Patrick Reeve, Reporter’s Notebook: In Israeli Kibbutz Rampaged by Hamas, Volunteers Still Cleaning Blood from Homes, ABC NEWS (Nov. 15, 2023).
- (4) Julia Frankel, UN Fires Additional Staffers After Probe Finds Potential Involvement in Oct. 7 Attack on Israel, AP (Aug. 5, 2024).
- (5) Links to Hamas with Thousands More Closely Related to Terrorists: Israeli Dossier, NEW YORK POST (Jan. 29, 2024).
- (6) Daniel Estrin, Hamas and Israel are Negotiating the Release of 34 Hostages from Gaza, NPR (Jan. 6, 2025).
- (7) Tia Goldenberg, Hostages in Gaza Endure Another Winter as Their Families Plead for a Ceasefire, AP (Jan. 8, 2025).
- (8) Israel Threatens to Step Up Gaza Strikes if Hamas Continues Rocket Attacks, STRAITS TIMES (Jan. 2, 2025).
- (9) <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-over-450-un-aid-agency-employees-gaza-are-military-operatives-2024-03-04/>.
- (10) <https://www.reuters.com/world/britain-italy-finland-pause-funding-un-refugee-agency-gaza-2024-01-27/>.
- (11) <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/28/world/middleeast/gaza-unrwa-hamas-israel.html>.
- (12) Id.
- (13) Brady Knox, Freed Israeli hostages say they were held in UN camp, WASHINGTON EXAMINER (Jan. 21, 2025).
- (14) <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-775777>.
- (15) Id.
- (16) Pamela Falk, Israel Says These Photos Show How Hamas Places Weapons in and Near U.N. Facilities in Gaza, Including Schools, CBS NEWS (Nov. 8, 2023).
- (17) Benjamin Kerstein, Hamas Terror Tunnel Found Beneath Two UN-Run Schools in Gaza, FOX NEWS (June 14, 2017), <https://www.foxnews.com/world/hamas-terror-tunnel-found-beneath-two-un-run-schools-in-gaza>.
- (18) U.N. Doc. S/2015/286 (Apr. 27, 2015).
- (19) Id. at ¶ 82.
- (20) UN Disciplines Palestinian Staffers for Anti-Semitic Facebook Posts, FORWARD (Oct. 23, 2015).
- (21) Gianluca Pacchiani, UNRWA Textbooks Were Pivotal in Radicalizing Generations of Gazans — Watchdog, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (Mar. 26, 2024), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/unrwa-textbooks-were-pivotal-in-radicalizing-generations-of-gazans-watchdog/>.
- (22) Id.
- (23) Id.
- (24) Pacchiani, supra note 20.
- (25) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-examining-contribution-to-un-agency-1.500892> (last updated Oct. 5, 2004).
- (26) <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/terror-un-payroll>.