

Addameer Prisoners' Support and Human Rights Association
Al-Haq – Defending Human Rights
Huryyat- Centre for Defence of Liberties and Civil Rights
Jerusalem Center for Legal Aid and Human Rights
Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies
Independent commission for Human Rights (Observer)



Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights
Aldameer Association for Human Rights
Defence for Children International – Palestine
BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and
Refugee Rights
The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

01 August 2019

Palestinian Refugees Must not suffer the Consequences of Alleged Misconduct

PHROC: Support UNRWA and Ensure Refugee Rights under International Law

A ten-page report was issued by the ethics office of United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to the United Nations, alleging misconduct and abuse of authority of the senior staff. The UN has initiated an investigation into these serious allegations. Nevertheless, the Netherlands and Switzerland have already decided to suspend funding to the refugee agency effective for the year 2020.¹ While the Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC) supports the ongoing UN investigation into the alleged misconduct, PHROC is gravely concerned by the decisions to suspend funding to UNRWA.

The allegations presented in UNRWA's own ethics office report spurred the initiation of an ongoing investigation by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). However, neither the UNRWA ethics office report nor the ongoing OIOS investigation justify the suspension of funding to UNRWA and refugees. Further, the constituency that UNRWA² serves, approximately 5.5 million Palestine refugees, are the real people who will suffer from such suspension of funding, which could result in dramatic decreases in vital services provided to them.

In what appears to be a hasty and politically-motivated decision, the Netherlands and Switzerland are following the US suspension of critical funding to UNRWA while disregarding the fact the OIOS investigation is still underway. Moreover, if the OIOS investigation were to find the allegations to be partially or completely true, funding UNRWA should not be conditioned on personnel misconduct. If such allegations were proven to be true, the UN and concerned states should take measures to rectify the situation, hold those proven to have been involved in such conduct accountable, develop its internal control systems and ensure UNRWA's efficiency and ability to fulfill its mandate.

¹Ian Williams, Al-Jazeera, Ethics report accuses UNRWA leadership of abuse of power, 29 July 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/topics/country/netherlands.html> [accessed 1 August 2019].

² UNRWA was created via UN Resolution 302 of December 1949 and tasked with providing humanitarian aid and assistance to Palestine refugees. See, UN General Assembly, 302 (IV). *Assistance to Palestine Refugees*, 8 December 1949, A/RES/302, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4fe2ffa52.html> [accessed 19 January 2018].

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The actions taken by the Netherlands and Switzerland not only cripple UNRWA's capacity to fulfill its mandate but send a message to Palestinian refugees that they are to be held accountable for the alleged misconduct.

The suspension of funding comes at a particularly crucial time, when UNRWA has been appealing to European and other states to increase their contributions in order to fill the gap created by the [halting of US funding](#). We are concerned that the Netherlands' and Switzerland's decisions are influenced by the [USA-Israel campaign to undermine and delegitimize UNRWA](#), which includes concerted efforts to [change Palestinian refugees' legal status and rights](#) under international law.

Furthermore, the allegations precede the voting of the renewal of UNRWA's mandate, to be concluded in the upcoming session of the UN General Assembly in September 2019. Opponents of UNRWA will likely use the allegations to negatively influence UNGA member states' support.

In order to protect UNRWA and enable it to continue its functions with transparency and integrity, PHROC calls upon the Netherlands and Switzerland to reconsider and revoke their decision, increase their contributions to UNRWA, and resist direct or indirect influence of campaigns that target the very existence of UNRWA and refugee rights. In addition, we call on the member states of the UN to continue their support to UNRWA by ensuring continued funding and renewing the mandate of UNRWA.

END

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Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council comprising:



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 Sahar Francis
 General Director



Addameer Association for Human Rights
 Hala Jaber
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