

United States Senate

COMMITTEES:
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
FINANCE
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VETERANS' AFFAIRS

December 4, 2023

The Honorable Linda Thomas-Greenfield
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations
United States Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY, 10017

Mr. Philippe Lazzarini
Commissioner-General
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA)
P.O. Box 140157
Amman, Jordan, 11814

Dear Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield and Commissioner-General Lazzarini:

I am writing to you regarding a recent disturbing report that an Israeli hostage was held inside Gaza for nearly 50 days in the attic of a teacher employed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA). According to Israeli journalist Almog Boker, “this is a father of 10 children who locked the abductee in the attic, hardly provided him with food, and did not provide him with medicine.”¹ Then, after the publication of Mr. Boker’s report, UNRWA demanded that the Israeli journalist “immediately delete[] the post” and provide more information about the incident.²

These allegations hardly come as a surprise given UNRWA’s history of antisemitism.³ Prior reporting indicates that UNRWA has employed individuals affiliated with Hamas,⁴ including

¹ Mike Brest, *UN Palestinian Agency looking into claim teacher held Israeli hostage in attic*, Washington Examiner (Dec. 1, 2023), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-security/united-nations-gaza-teacher-israeli-hostage-attic>.

² Jimmy Quinn, *U.N. Agency for Palestinians Asks Israeli Journalist to Remove Post about its Alleged Link to a Hostage-Taker*, National Review (Dec. 1, 2023), <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/u-n-agency-for-palestinians-asks-israeli-journalist-to-remove-post-about-its-alleged-link-to-a-hostage-taker/>.

³ Marc Rod, *UNRWA-produced education materials contain antisemitic content, watchdog group documents*, Jewish Insider (July 11, 2022), <https://jewishinsider.com/2022/07/unrwa-textbook-antisemitism-palestinian-education-united-nations/>.

⁴ Brett D. Schaefer and James Phillips, *Why Trump Was Right to End Funding of the UN Palestinian Aid Organization*, Heritage Foundation (Sept. 6, 2018), <https://www.heritage.org/middle-east/commentary/why-trump-was-right-end-funding-the-un-palestinian-aid-organization>.

graduating at least 100 Hamas terrorists from its schools.⁵ UNRWA facilities have been used to store weapons and as part of terrorist operations.⁶ Following the October 7 terror attacks against Israel, certain UNRWA staffers “immediately celebrated and justified” Hamas’ actions.⁷ We also know that for over a decade, Hamas has stolen aid from the UNRWA intended for the Palestinian people, including fuel and medical equipment following the October 7 attacks.⁸

The United States will not be complicit in propping up Hamas’ terrorism, and this report further proves why deep change is necessary within UNRWA before we even consider providing another dollar to the agency. Additionally, it is deeply concerning that, despite the prevalence of these reports, the United Nations has seemingly done nothing to investigate or prevent the siphoning of UNRWA funding by terrorists. And UNRWA continues to double down on its claims that each subsequent, documented report is “unsubstantiated.”⁹

By December 18, please provide answers to the following questions:

1. Was the captor referenced in Almog Boker’s report a current or former employee of UNRWA?
2. Has the alleged incident been thoroughly investigated by UNRWA? If yes, please describe that investigation and your findings in detail. If no, please state why not.
3. Has the alleged incident been thoroughly investigated by the UN? If yes, please describe that investigation and your findings in detail. If no, please state why not.
4. What is UNRWA’s process for ensuring their employees are not simultaneously working with Hamas or other terrorist organizations? Please provide specific details about how employees are screened for affiliations with terrorist organizations.
5. What is UNRWA’s process for ensuring that its facilities are not used to support terrorist activities?
6. The “2023-2024 U.S.-UNRWA Framework for Cooperation” states that “UNRWA commits to take all possible measures to ensure funding provided by the United States to UNRWA does not provide assistance to, or otherwise support, terrorists or terrorist organizations.” Please explain in detail what measures UNRWA is taking pursuant to the Framework to prevent the diversion of humanitarian assistance to terrorist organizations.

⁵ UNRWA school celebrates Hamas’s ‘jihad warriors’ in Gaza – report, Jerusalem Post (Nov. 8, 2023), <https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/gaza-news/article-772282>.

⁶ Mitch Ginsburg, *Militants ‘blow up UNRWA clinic,’ killing 3 soldiers*, The Times of Israel (July 30, 2014), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/3-idf-soldiers-killed-in-booby-trapped-unrwa-clinic/#ixzz38yn7YaJ3>.

⁷ Gabe Kaminsky, *UN agency staff ‘celebrated and justified’ Hamas’s attack on Israel: Watchdog*, Washington Examiner (Nov. 8, 2023), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/foreign/united-nations-agency-celebrated-justified-hamas-attack-israel>.

⁸ Ari Blaff, *UNRWA Deletes Social-Media Post Accusing Hamas of Stealing Humanitarian Supplies*, National Review (Oct. 16, 2023), <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/unwra-deletes-social-media-post-accusing-hamas-of-stealing-humanitarian-supplies/>; *UN Halts Aid into Gaza after ‘Hamas Theft,’* The Guardian (Feb. 6, 2009), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/06/gaza-un-aid-hamas>.

⁹ UNRWA, *Spreading Unsubstantiated Claims about UNRWA Must Immediately Stop* (Dec. 1, 2023), <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/spreading-unsubstantiated-claims-about-unrwa-must-immediately-stop>.

7. Has the UN investigated any prior reports about the potential links between UNRWA and terrorist organizations such as Hamas? If yes, please describe those investigations and your findings in detail. If no, please state why not.
8. What types of oversight does the UN provide over UNRWA? Please document the specific processes you have put into place to ensure UNRWA personnel, facilities, and resources are not used to support terrorists or terrorist organizations.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator