



# VCHR Demands Immediate and Unconditional Reinstatement of Full UNRWA Funding

## Participating Organizations

Alexandria for Palestine  
 Alliance of Baptists  
 American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee  
 American Muslims for Palestine  
 American Muslims for Palestine Richmond Chapter  
 Appalachian Peace Education Center  
 Arab American Association of Central Virginia  
 Central Atlantic Conference (UCC) Palestine/Israel Network  
 Defenders for Freedom, Justice, and Equality  
 Episcopal Peace Fellowship—National Capital Regional Chapter  
 Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church - USA  
 Here4TheKids  
 Jewish Voice for Peace  
 National Arab American Women's Association  
 New Dominion PAC  
 Northern Virginians for Peace & Justice  
 Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace  
 Plowshares Peace & Justice Center  
 Richmonders for Peace in Israel-Palestine  
 Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East, Northern Virginia Chapter  
 United Methodists for Kairos Response  
 US Campaign for Palestinian Rights  
 Washington Interfaith Alliance for Middle East Peace

**The Virginia Coalition for Human Rights (VCHR) reasserts its unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people**, who are confronting an unparalleled humanitarian crisis in Gaza, ethnic cleansing in the West Bank and Jerusalem and living under an apartheid system across Palestine. Since October, Israel, with United States complicity, has been committing genocide in Gaza upon a population who are 70% refugees. The Palestinian people have been subjected to indiscriminate bombardment, mass killing, kidnappings, assassinations, and starvation as a weapon war; all of which are violations of international and human rights laws.

**Israel's Israeli attacks against UNRWA and other humanitarian aid workers.** Israel has also actively prevented the vast majority of aid from entering Gaza and has targeted both aid workers and starving Palestinians who have attempted to reach the aid dropped by air and when attempting to reach the very few aid trucks who manage to pass through.

**Palestinian refugees are enduring significantly expanding hardships across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the occupied Palestinian territories.** Suspending UNRWA funding only increases these hardships. Today, Palestinian refugees, and their descendants of 4 and 5 generations continue to live in refugee camps. 5.9 million out of nearly 8 million are eligible to receive UNRWA services. For 75 years, The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has been the largest and most established aid organization in Gaza and for Palestinian refugees in Palestine and neighboring countries. It was established by the UN to provide for the refugees of the 1948 Nakba and continued forcible displacement until a just political solution could be negotiated with the Palestinians that includes the internationally recognized right of return for refugees. UNRWA is crucial in 3 areas: education, healthcare, and social services. It has built schools and provides education in addition to essential life-sustaining aid.<sup>1</sup> Since the genocide in Gaza began, Israel has killed at least 178 UNRWA employees and destroyed the vast majority of UNRWA facilities, including schools and aid warehouses.

**Unsubstantiated claims against UNRWA.** In late January Israel issued baseless and malicious allegations against 12 individual employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as a pretext to have the Biden administration halt US contributions to UNRWA, imposing further collective punishment on the population of Gaza. The decision by the United States and other donor countries to suspend funding deepens the humanitarian crisis and exacerbates Israel's forced starvation of millions of Palestinians in Gaza.<sup>2</sup> This defunding has critically impaired UNRWA's capacity to execute its lifesaving relief operations, placing the lives of the 2.3 million Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip, currently on the brink of famine, in even greater peril.<sup>3</sup>

**Starvation as a weapon of war.** UNRWA's Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini has vehemently criticized the Israeli authorities' decision to block UNRWA food convoys from entering northern Gaza, labeling it an "outrageous" maneuver that deliberately hampers the provision of essential assistance. Israel's blockade is driving thousands of civilians towards famine and death due to hunger, dehydration, disease, injuries, and homelessness. UNRWA is mandated by the United Nations in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194, which affirms the right of return to Palestinian refugees. By withholding funding to UNRWA, the United States is participating in Israel's human rights violations and deliberate collective punishment of the Palestinian people.<sup>4</sup> Commissioner-General Lazzarini stated that it is a race against time to save UNRWA. This withholding of funds (the US has been the largest donor to UNRWA) feeds a humanitarian catastrophe, but importantly it also denies Palestinian refugees their rights and status under international law.<sup>5</sup>

**Violations of US Law and International Law.** The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, requires that any security assistance or arms provided by the United States to any country must advance internationally recognized human rights and avoid identification of the United States with any violations of those rights. Israel is in clear violation of numerous human rights laws, UN resolutions and is under investigation by the ICJ, the highest court in the world, for plausible genocide. By withholding UNRWA funding and continuing to send Israel billions in funds and weapons, the US is in clear violation of its own laws, not to mention international law.

**Therefore, VCHR demands immediate and unconditional reinstatement of full UNRWA funding.** Based on the above, VCHR calls on Congress and the Biden Administration to immediately and unconditionally reinstate full UNRWA funding and ensure the resumption of continued delivery of crucial humanitarian and social services to Palestinian refugees in Gaza and across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and other areas. The interruption of these services deepens the humanitarian crisis, constitutes collective punishment of the Palestinian population and is in violation of international law with regard to the rights of refugees.

*The Virginia Coalition for Human Rights is committed to advocating for justice, peace, and human rights for all. We stand with the Palestinian people in their legitimate quest for freedom, dignity, and self-determination amid one of the gravest humanitarian crises of our times. Our collective moral and humanitarian obligation is to speak out against injustice and tirelessly work towards a future where peace and human rights are honored for the Palestinians in Gaza, all of occupied Palestine, and throughout the diaspora.*

#### Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> [The New Humanitarian | What UNRWA funding suspensions mean for Gaza aid](https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/interview/2024/01/30/what-unrwa-funding-suspensions-mean-gaza-aid), <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/interview/2024/01/30/what-unrwa-funding-suspensions-mean-gaza-aid>. By Eric Reidy (Jan. 30, 2024)

<sup>2</sup> [Which countries are still funding UNRWA amid Israel's war on Gaza? | Israel War on Gaza News | Al Jazeera](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/17/which-countries-are-still-funding-unrwa), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/17/which-countries-are-still-funding-unrwa>, By Alasdair Soussi (Feb. 17, 2024)

<sup>3</sup> [Gaza: Aid operations in peril amid funding crisis | UN News](https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/02/1146117); <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/02/1146117> (Feb. 1, 2024)

<sup>4</sup> [Which countries are still funding UNRWA amid Israel's war on Gaza? | Israel War on Gaza News | Al Jazeera](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/17/which-countries-are-still-funding-unrwa), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/17/which-countries-are-still-funding-unrwa>, By Alasdair Soussi (Feb. 17, 2024)

<sup>5</sup> [Joint NGO Statement: EU and Member States must sustain funding to UNRWA | International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](https://www.rescue.org/article/joint-ngo-statement-eu-and-member-states-must-sustain-funding-unrwa), <https://www.rescue.org/article/joint-ngo-statement-eu-and-member-states-must-sustain-funding-unrwa>, International Rescue Committee (Feb. 29, 2024)