

February 14th, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Mr. President:

We are non-governmental organizations supporting the protection of civilians in the conflict in the Occupied Gaza Strip and writing to urge you to restore funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

After nearly four months of conflict which has devastated Gaza's infrastructure and dangerously reduced essential supplies, hundreds of thousands of civilians – the vast majority of them children and women – are displaced and at grave risk of starvation and deadly disease. UNRWA is the most significant direct provider of humanitarian aid in the territory, with more than two million Palestinian civilians relying on it for critical necessities and services. UNRWA and its staff have gone to heroic lengths to continue aid operations even after catastrophic damage to many of its facilities and the death of more than 150 of their colleagues since the start of the current hostilities.

Twelve individuals among the 13,000 people UNRWA employed in the territory at the start of the current fighting are accused of taking part in Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack on Israel. UNRWA, which has categorically and repeatedly condemned the attack, swiftly terminated the contracts of those accused. UNRWA's Commissioner-General has requested the investigation of these employees be overseen by the highest investigative authority at the UN, while the UN Secretary General made it clear the Secretariat will cooperate with a competent authority to prosecute the individuals. This is in addition to UNRWA's January 17, 2024 announcement that it is commissioning an independent review of staff guidelines and procedures to ensure that all staff adhere to humanitarian principles.

Continuing to suspend assistance to UNRWA for the alleged actions of individuals that UNRWA itself condemns and has pledged to help investigate is not only unjust, but detrimental to your administration's goal of ending the current humanitarian crisis. Denying resources to UNRWA will only deepen the deprivation faced by civilians in Gaza, helping to spread rather than fight starvation and disease.

We therefore urge you to immediately restore US funding to UNRWA and to work with it and other aid agencies to urgently end the growing humanitarian catastrophe in the territory.

Signed,

Action Corps
Alliance of Baptists
American Friends Service Committee
Americans for Peace Now
Amnesty International USA
Brooklyn For Peace
Carolina Peace Center
Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC)
Center for Economic and Policy Research
Center for International Policy
Center for Jewish Nonviolence
Center for Victims of Torture
Charity & Security Network
Church World Service
Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)
CommonDefense.us
Demand Progress Education Fund
Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)
Extend
Freedom Forward
Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)
Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
Grassroots International
Humanity & Inclusion
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ)
Just Foreign Policy
MADRE
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
Middle East Democracy Center (MEDC)
Migrant Roots Media
Minnesota Peace Project
MPower Change
National Council of Churches
National Iranian American Council (NIAC)
New Hampshire Peace Action
Nonviolent Peaceforce
Peace Action
Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness
RootsAction.org
September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team
Sojourners
The Episcopal Church
The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)
Truman Center for National Policy
Unitarian Universalist Association
United for Peace and Justice
UNRWA USA National Committee
Win Without War
Women for Weapons Trade Transparency
World BEYOND War
Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation
Zomia Center