

Israeli lies exposed with independent investigation concluding there is no evidence of UNRWA staff links to Hamas as the genocidal regime claimed



Israel lied about UNRWA involvement with Hamas, as part of its war of hunger against Palestinians

United Nations, April 22 (RHC)-- Israel has not presented credible evidence to support its claims that UNRWA staff were members of so-called "terrorist" groups, an independent review for the United Nations led by a former French foreign minister has concluded.

The claims against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) led to a massive funding deficit as several donor countries announced cuts. The independent review into the relief agency's practices was also commissioned, as well as a separate investigation into the October attack itself, by the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services.

The review, headed by former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna and supported by three Nordic research institutes, makes clear that Israel failed to support its claims about UNRWA staff belonging to either Hamas's military wing or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

In January, Israel accused UNRWA staff members of abetting the October 7 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,139 people and the capture of an unknown number of people, thought to be in excess of 200.

In the original six-page dossier, seen by Al Jazeera, Israeli intelligence provided a number of accusations against UNRWA without evidence, including that the agency's facilities had been used by Hamas in its October attack. Moreover, according to the dossier, 12 staff members had participated directly in the attack, with 190 others offering intelligence and logistical support.

In March, the Israeli military claimed it had evidence implicating four more UNRWA staff members. However, the Colonna report notes that Israel has not expressed any concerns about the UNRWA employee vetting process since 2011, making its first complaints about the process in January 2024.

A more detailed report produced by the Nordic research groups supporting Colonna wrote: "Israeli authorities have to date not provided any supporting evidence nor responded to letters from UNRWA in March, and again in April, requesting the names and supporting evidence that would enable UNRWA to open an investigation."

The groups are the Swedish Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, the Norwegian Chr Michelsen Institute, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

Based solely on the Israeli accusations, 18 donor countries, including UNRWA's principal donor, the United States, suspended funding to the agency. Nevertheless, while some – such as the United Kingdom – chose to wait on the findings from the Colonna report, the majority of donors had already reversed their initial positions and resumed funding, with some, such as the European Union, increasing their spending.

Only Austria, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the UK and the U.S. have maintained funding suspensions. The U.S. will maintain its suspension until March 2025, despite its own intelligence services in February expressing what it called "low confidence" in the Israeli allegations.

Contacted by Al Jazeera, a U.S. Department of State spokesperson confirmed it was "important the allegations made against [UNRWA] are thoroughly investigated," although the ban on funding was implemented before any such investigation.

A spokesperson for the UK's Foreign Office told Al Jazeera that it was "appalled" by the Israeli allegations and was exploring other avenues of getting humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Germany, one of Israel's most steadfast allies, confirmed it had resumed funding for UNRWA activities in all areas except Gaza.

"We have enough funding to carry us through until June. After that, it's not clear how we'll fund our work," said Juliette Touma, a UNRWA spokesperson. "No other agency can do what we do." "We previously operated throughout Gaza, providing aid and education. However, in late March, Israel said it would block UNRWA food convoys into the north," she added, referring to the area where experts have declared

famine is imminent.

Famine now threatens millions of people in the Gaza Strip, according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system, which is used by aid agencies to determine threat levels.

According to an IPC report, roughly 210,000 people living in northern Gaza and Gaza City are likely already experiencing famine. The south and centre of Gaza, including Deir el-Balah, Khan Younis, and the governorate of Rafah, are classified as “emergencies” and expected to succumb to famine by July if no intervention or ceasefire comes.

“I’ve never known an area enter the IPC system so quickly,” Touma continued. “In Yemen, it took years. In Gaza, it took three months. Gaza has been sealed off.” “Make no mistake: Hunger is being used as a weapon of war,” she said.

“Living conditions within the Strip are appalling. We have thousands of people living on top of each other. Many are living in the kind of tent you might set up in a garden. There are massive queues, just for the toilet. As you’d imagine, hygiene is abysmal.” she added.

Exacerbating matters has been a halt in the import of commercial supplies as a consequence of the fighting, meaning that toothpaste, soap and basic hygiene items are difficult to obtain. “In terms of disease, we’re lucky that there was a high vaccination rate among the population. However, you can’t vaccinate against hunger,” Touma said.

Israel’s objection to UNRWA’s work among the Palestinian population has long been a bone of contention.

Last week, the head of UNRWA, Philippe Lazzarini, told the UN Security Council that Israel sought to end the agency’s operations in Gaza. “The agency’s requests to deliver aid to the north are repeatedly denied. Our staff are barred from coordination meetings between Israel and humanitarian actors,” Lazzarini said.

Continuing his comments, he told the 15-member body that the agency was the victim of “an insidious campaign to end” its activities, with “serious implications for international peace and security”.

Israel has suggested that other agencies, such as the UN World Food Programme, could fill the breach should UNRWA’s work in Gaza be halted.

But given the extent of the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, no other agency appears to have the capability to replace UNRWA’s team of 30,000, many already deployed in Gaza, with workflows and systems in place.

Alternatives to the kind of access UNRWA has utilised throughout the war have only had a limited impact on alleviating the crisis.

Despite claims in recent days from both the US and Israel that additional aid had been allowed in, the UN has still reported that flows are painfully lower than those needed to sustain the population trapped in Gaza. Backers therefore argue that UNRWA urgently needs to be allowed to work in Gaza without restrictions and with the full support of the international community.

It’s a position also held in the Colonna review, which notes that the agency’s work was “indispensable”, and that UNRWA “remains pivotal in providing life-saving humanitarian aid and essential social services, particularly in health and education, to Palestinian refugees in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank.”

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/352843-israeli-lies-exposed-with-independent-investigation-concluding-there-is-no-evidence-of-unrwa-staff-links-to-amas-as-the-genocidal-regime-claimed>



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