

# *UN overwhelmingly renews agency helping Palestinian refugees in defiance of Trump*

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United Nations, December 15 (RHC)-- The United Nations General Assembly has overwhelmingly voted to extend the mandate for a UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees for another three years amid a cash shortfall triggered by a U.S. decision to cut funding for the body by more than half.

The UN's Fourth Committee approved extending the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) until June 30, 2023, with 169 votes in favor and nine abstentions, while the United States and Israel voted against the decision.

UNRWA was established in 1949 to provide education, health and relief services as well as housing and microfinance assistance to some 5.5 million registered refugees in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

The agency has faced budgetary difficulties since last year after the United States -- previously its biggest donor -- under the administration of President Donald Trump has taken an increasingly hard-line stance toward Palestine and halted its aid of \$360 million to the organization per year.

Israel welcomed the controversial move by the United States to cut funding to a United Nations agency supporting Palestinian refugees across the Middle East. Last January, UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl slammed the "political dimension" of the U.S. decision to cut funding for the body by more than half, warning that it could escalate instability across the Middle East.

Krahenbuhl said the US plan to reduce funding for the agency "has a political dimension that I think should be avoided." The UNRWA head says millions of Palestinian refugees "cannot be simply wished away."

"We welcome the decision to renew the international mandate to UNRWA and we see it as another failure to hostile US policies to the Palestinian rights," Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters.

Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), also hailed the UN vote and said it was the United Nations' responsibility to combat the US and Israeli attacks on Palestinian refugees.

"All attempts at trying to limit UNRWA's mandate or defund it or attack it have failed, and we hope that the international community will continue to come to the rescue," she said.

The U.S. Mission to the United Nations refused to make any immediate response to a request for comment on the vote.

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