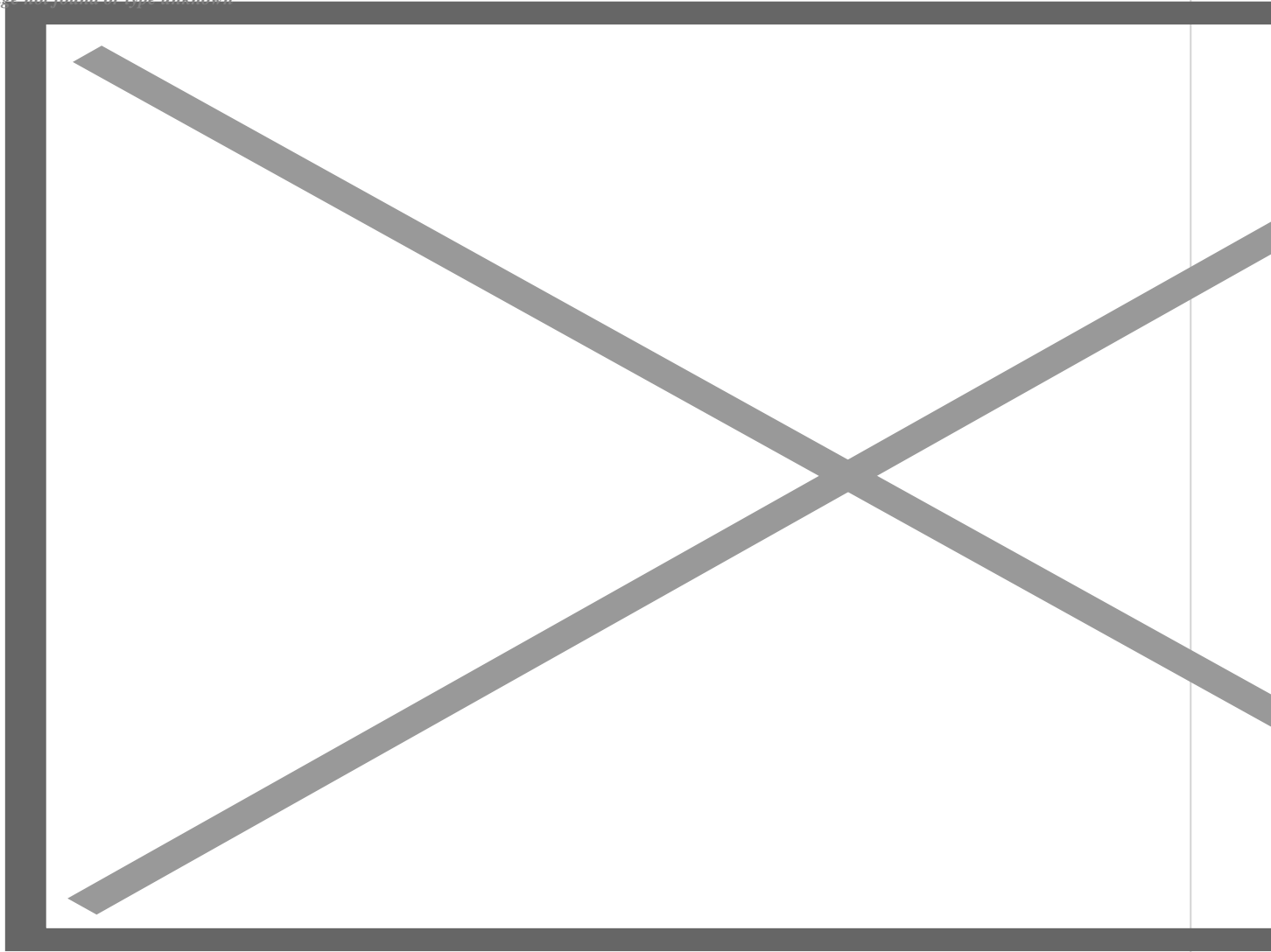


UNRWA chief says Israel aims to destroy UN agency in Gaza

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People walk past the damaged Gaza City headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) on February 15, 2024. (Photo by AFP)

United Nations, February 18 (RHC)-- The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) says Israel is waging a concerted campaign aimed at destroying the main UN agency in the besieged Gaza

Strip. Speaking to the Swiss newspaper group Tamedia, Philippe Lazzarini said there has been a long-term political goal behind the idea of destroying UNRWA.

He said that "it is believed that if the aid agency is abolished, the status of the Palestinian refugees will be resolved once and for all -- and with it, the right of return." "Just look at the number of actions Israel is taking against UNRWA."

Philippe Lazzarini said more than 150 UNRWA installations have been hit since the regime launched its devastating war on the Gaza Strip in early October. The UN agency confirmed on Friday that a total number of 158 employees have been killed by Israeli airstrikes on Gaza.

Lazzarini also cited the regime's orders for contractors at the port of Ashdod to "stop handling certain food deliveries for UNRWA." He said "All these demands come from" Tel Aviv.

Tel Aviv has called for Lazzarini to step down following claims that 12 of UNRWA's employees were suspected of involvement in the Hamas Operation al-Aqsa Storm against the regime on Oct. 7.

Lazzarini said the regime was alone in calling for him to quit and there was "no reason" to comply with the call "especially since my resignation would not improve the situation at UNRWA." "The criticisms are not concerned with me personally, but with the organization as a whole. The calls for resignation are part of the campaign to destroy UNRWA."

The regime's allegations against UNRWA have prompted more than 10 donor countries, including the United States, Germany, the European Union, Canada, and Japan to suspend financial support. The funding from these countries makes up the bulk of all funding received by the UN agency.

UNRWA said being cut off in this way means the agency will run out of money altogether within weeks. Nearly the entire population of Gaza now relies on UNRWA for basics including food, water, and hygiene supplies.

Since the regime started its war on Gaza in early October, 1.9 million people – 85 percent of Gaza's population – have been internally displaced.

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