

Report says U.S. pause on funding UNRWA may become permanent

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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)

Washington, March 15 (RHC)-- Washington's controversial decision to pause its funding for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees earlier this year is reportedly likely to become "permanent." Reuters news agency carried the report on Wednesday, attributing the likelihood to opposition at Congress to the country's financial contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

UNRWA provides healthcare, education, and other vital services to the Palestinian people. The agency was accused by Israel in January of having links to an October 7 operation launched by the Gaza Strip's Palestinian resistance movements against the occupying entity in response to the intensification of Tel Aviv's decades-long crimes against Palestinians.

The allegations 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 used to make up the bulk of all funding received by the agency.

The collective move against UNRWA came amid mass displacement and approaching all-out famine across Gaza prompted by an ongoing genocidal war that the regime has been waging against the coastal sliver in response to the October operation.

"Bipartisan opposition in Congress to funding UNRWA makes it unlikely the US will resume regular donations anytime soon, even as countries such as Sweden and Canada have said they will restart their contributions," Reuters' report said.

"A supplemental funding bill in the US Congress that includes military aid to Israel and Ukraine contains a provision that would block UNRWA from receiving funds if it becomes law," it said, adding, "[US] President Joe Biden's administration supports the bill."

"We have to plan for the fact that Congress may make that pause permanent," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters on Tuesday.

"...any new funding would need the support of at least some Republicans, who hold a majority in the House. Many have expressed their opposition to UNRWA," Reuters' report added.

It cited a statement by Representative Brian Mast, the Republican chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability -- one of the opponents -- as alleging that "UNRWA is a front..." "It masquerades as a relief organization while building the infrastructure to support Hamas..." he claimed.

Back in February, the UN agency said some of its employees had been tortured by the occupying regime to falsely admit that the agency had ties with Hamas and its retaliatory operation in October.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees says some of its employees were tortured by the occupying regime to falsely admit that the agency had ties with Hamas and its retaliatory operation in October last year.

The assertion made in a February report by UNRWA, detailed various cases of mistreatment in Israeli detention centers against Palestinians, including several working for the agency.

The document said several UNRWA Palestinian staffers had been detained by the Israeli occupation army in Gaza, and that the ill-treatment and abuse they said they had experienced included severe physical beatings, waterboarding, and threats of harm to family members.

"Agency staff members have been subject to threats and coercion by the Israeli authorities while in detention, and pressured to make false statements against the Agency, including that the Agency has

affiliations with Hamas and that UNRWA staff members took part in the 7 October 2023" operation, the report said.

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