

# **IINZ Report on New Zealand Support for UNRWA**

25 August 2019

## **Executive Summary**

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was established in 1949 to deal exclusively with approximately 750,000 Arabs displaced as a result of Israel's defensive 1948 War of Independence.

In contrast to the UNHCR, that looks after all other refugees in the world, UNRWA has a different definition of "refugee" and actively opposes resettlement. Today, there are over 5.5m people served by UNRWA.

There have been continuing, serious allegations and findings of corruption, links to terror groups, a perpetuation of the conflict, and egregious antisemitism from UNRWA staff.

Traditional allies of New Zealand, like the USA, Canada, EU countries, and Australia have condemned some of the controversies and some countries have suspended funding.

Over the past decade, New Zealand taxpayers have contributed more than NZ\$10m to UNRWA. Officials have not publicly acknowledged the controversies and continued to only praise UNRWA for its work. There has been no public comment on any need for reform within the agency or condemnation of antisemitism from any New Zealand official.

Internal New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) documents show that MFAT staff repeated UNRWA excuses and explanations without challenge or any attempt at independent research. There seemed to be political reasons for not acknowledging egregious failures within UNRWA.

MFAT staff also apparently accepted reports that have whitewashed concerns. Discussions of issues or a need for reform was not minuted, not given in briefings to Ministers, and/or has not been publicly discussed or acknowledged for taxpayers to consider.

The Israel Institute of New Zealand recommends that New Zealand suspend funding to UNRWA and stop voting for the UNGA resolutions in support of UNRWA until there is a demonstrable commitment to:

- ending corruption;
- removing inciteful material from schools and appropriately disciplining staff that encourage violence; and
- conforming to the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees definition of a refugee.

New Zealand should also work to achieve a similar voting pattern and responsible aid giving from allied countries.

After seeing a draft copy of this report, MFAT responded by saying "New Zealand will not make any further payments to UNRWA until we have reviewed the report's findings and assessed UNRWA's response to any recommendations." It is time for New Zealand to reconsider ongoing, unconditional support for UNRWA.

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## **Background to UNRWA**

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was established in 1949 to deal exclusively with the Arabs who were displaced as a result of Israel's defensive 1948 War of Independence<sup>1</sup>. The agency was given mandate through a United Nations General Assembly Resolution<sup>2</sup> to carry out "the direct relief and works programmes as recommended by the Economic Survey Mission".

The UNRWA mandate was originally for three years and included the establishment of "a programme of useful public works for the employment of able-bodied refugees as a first measure towards their rehabilitation; and that, meanwhile, relief, restricted to those in need, be continued throughout the coming year." Current UNRWA services include education, social work, health, and microfinance<sup>3</sup>.

The UN agency is devoted to "persons whose normal place of residence was [British Mandate] Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict"<sup>4</sup> and now includes all of their descendants also. Many of these people now reside in Egypt, Gaza, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and in the West Bank.

UNRWA's initial mandate as a 'relief and works' agency supporting Palestinian refugees has been renewed for the past seventy years and will be up for review again in June 2020. UNRWA continues to provide services to Palestinian refugees, including in the fields of health, social services, education, microfinance, and direct cash emergency programmes<sup>5</sup>.

When UNRWA began operations in 1950, it served approximately 750,000 Arab refugees<sup>6</sup>. There was no such agency set up for the 820,000 Jewish refugees forced from Arab lands at the same time – other countries, primarily Israel, resettled those refugees<sup>7</sup>.

## **Controversies**

### **Corruption and inefficiency**

The 2019 budget for UNRWA was US\$749 million<sup>8</sup> (\$135 per person) and UNRWA employed more than 30,000 staff<sup>9</sup> (as well as thousands of people who have been employed on daily contracts for years<sup>10</sup>) serving approximately 5.5m people<sup>11</sup>. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), that looks after all other refugees in the world (a total of 70.8m people), 2019 budget was US\$7,352.3 million (\$104 per displaced person) and they employed 16,803 personnel<sup>12</sup>.

A 2006 letter<sup>13</sup> written to Condoleezza Rice from Congressmen Mark Kirk and Steven Rothman stated, "... it is clear UNRWA is wrought by mismanagement, ineffective policies, and failure to secure its finances." Continuing allegations of fraud and corruption have been filed against UNRWA by the US and other nations and NGOs over the years<sup>14,15</sup>, despite UNRWA committed in 2015 to fight fraud and corruption<sup>16</sup>.

A 2018 internal review found “credible and corroborated” allegations of “sexual misconduct, nepotism, retaliation, discrimination and other abuses of authority, for personal gain, to suppress legitimate dissent, and to otherwise achieve their personal objectives” by senior UNRWA staff<sup>17</sup>. UNRWA’s top official, the commissioner general, Pierre Krähenbühl, was accused, among other things, of appointing an adviser with whom he was romantically involved and flying her around the world with him<sup>18</sup>.

Arabs who are identified as refugees by UNRWA have also raised concerns about corruption in the system. An Arab Palestinian Human Rights Activist wrote a 2014 op-ed, including “The more Palestinians suffer, the more power goes to UNRWA, which allows it to raise unchecked humanitarian funds and purchase munitions... [UNRWA] rakes in more than \$1.2 billion a year as an “incentive” to continue our status as refugees.”<sup>19</sup>

Another Palestinian refugee reported in 2018 that “[UNRWA] are using me to get more funds in my name. I don’t see any changes for the better... I blame the corruption for this reality... An UNRWA employee can earn \$10,000 per month. Others earn more. They have luxury cars and apartments. Some have villas for free. Meanwhile, local Palestinian teachers hired by UNRWA earn \$700 to \$800 per month. The people from abroad get 10 times more. The more the refugees suffer, these people live a more luxurious life. I blame them for me being a refugee.”<sup>20</sup>

There have also been scandals over the way UNRWA might inflate its count of Palestinian refugees, particularly in Lebanon. In 2018, for example, UNRWA reported 450,000 refugees there<sup>21</sup>, yet a census by the Lebanese government found that the actual number was only 175,000<sup>22,23</sup>.

UNRWA still has a “cash assistance” program that involves handing out cash to people in Gaza and Syria without any accountability or oversight for these disbursements, which in 2018 amounted to US\$244 million<sup>24</sup>. These cash handouts have been condemned for their waste, fraud, and as a diversion of funds to terrorists and other bad actors<sup>25</sup>.

Allegations in a 2011 investigative report exposing corruption<sup>26</sup> within UNRWA, including money laundering and terror financing, were rejected outright by the agency<sup>27</sup>. UNRWA stopped aid to Gaza in 2009 because Hamas police were stealing the materials<sup>28</sup>. However, UNRWA aid items have been found on sale at supermarkets in Gaza in 2019<sup>29</sup>.

### **Promotion of terror**

UNRWA vehicles have been used to transport weapons and terrorists<sup>30</sup> and UNRWA schools were used as weapon caches and launching pads in the 2014 Gaza war<sup>31</sup>. In 2017, Hamas terror tunnels were discovered under UNRWA schools in Gaza<sup>32</sup>. These were condemned by UNRWA<sup>33</sup> but links continue to be found between the UN agency and terror groups (see below). A 2010 internal report<sup>34</sup> found UNRWA had deficient oversight for its facilities. This deficiency has continued<sup>35</sup>.

Founded in 2004, the Charitable Association For Palestinian Relief (CAPR) is a charitable organization affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad<sup>36</sup>, a designated terrorist entity<sup>37</sup>.

CAPR has reported that they have been involved in distributing UNRWA materials and there is documented evidence of CAPR activists facilitating UNRWA financial support in 2016<sup>38</sup>.

The head of UNRWA's employees' union in the Gaza Strip, Amir al-Mashal, is a Hamas official<sup>39</sup>. The military wing of Hamas is a designated terror entity<sup>40</sup> and other countries consider the entire Hamas organisation to be a terror entity<sup>41,42,43,44</sup>. UNRWA has objected to its staff belonging to Hamas or other terror organizations but has not taken decisive action on its own initiative to enforce its objections<sup>45</sup>.

Before al-Mashal, Suhail al-Hindi was an UNRWA teacher and Chairman of the UNRWA Employees Union in Gaza<sup>46</sup>. In 2017, al-Hindi resigned amid allegations he had been elected to the Hamas leadership<sup>47</sup>. This resignation was opposed by Hamas<sup>48</sup>.

The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center found UNRWA staffer, Muhammad al-Jamassi, employed as an engineer, was elected to Hamas's political bureau, its top governing body in 2017<sup>49</sup>.

A 2017 report by UN Watch<sup>50</sup> found examples of UNRWA teachers actively promoting radical Islamist terror against Israel. The report found at least five legal violations perpetrated by UNRWA staff. In 2015, similar reports<sup>51,52</sup> exposed 30 cases of online incitement from UNRWA staff who may have been associated with terror organisations. And John Ging, the head of UNRWA in Gaza, promoted political warfare targeting Israel<sup>53</sup>.

### **Perpetuating the conflict**

The Arab refugee problem created as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict is the only refugee problem in the world that has been perpetuated by the United Nations. The 2019 "in figures" report for UNRWA counts more than 5,545,540 refugees<sup>54</sup> - more than 7 times as many as when the agency started.

In contrast, the UN agency that provides for all other refugees in the world – the UNHCR<sup>55</sup> - consistently resettles people under its care<sup>56</sup>. The UNHCR serves 70,800,000 displaced people<sup>57</sup>.

UNHCR promotes the idea of fostering resilience and independence<sup>58</sup> so refugees are not reliant on aid forever. UNRWA, in contrast, actively opposes the resettlement of their registered refugees<sup>59</sup>.

This perpetuation of refugees is partly a function of the Arab nations refusing to resettle Arab Palestinians<sup>60</sup>. Lebanon's rejection of permanent settlement is excused on demographic, socio-economic, and political grounds<sup>61</sup>. They contend that the settlement of between 150,000 and 500,000 predominantly Sunni Muslims<sup>62</sup> would have serious demographic repercussions – upsetting the sectarian balance in the country. Lebanese officials have also claimed they do not have the necessary resources to welcome a large number of people, especially while many Lebanese citizens are in poverty<sup>63</sup> but has not suggested taking UNRWA funding to care for people in its country rather than perpetuate their refugee status.

Some Arab Palestinian refugees, themselves, have also rejected plans of resettlement outside of Israel<sup>64</sup>. UNRWA also perpetuates the notion of a “right of return”<sup>65,66</sup> that is interpreted as the personal right of every Arab Palestinian who left his or her home in British Mandate Palestine in 1948 or afterwards and that of their descendants, to return to it and to reclaim his or her property in full.

Such a claim has no legal precedence<sup>67</sup> and has not been applied in other cases of wartime refugees throughout the twentieth century. Yet UNRWA school textbooks perpetuate the “right of return” as a natural right<sup>68</sup>. This sort of education is part of the reason leading UNRWA scholar, Dr Einat Wilf, has called UNRWA “an obstacle to peace”<sup>69,70</sup> and Switzerland’s foreign minister, Ignazio Cassis, said UNRWA is “part of the problem”<sup>71</sup>. As long as UNRWA perpetuates the idea that the growing number of people it provides services to should be allowed to freely live in Israel, the less chance there is for lasting peace.

Furthermore, UNRWA changed the eligibility requirements to be a Palestinian refugee in 1965 to include third-generation descendants, it extended it again to include all descendants of Palestine refugee males, including legally adopted children, regardless of whether they had been granted citizenship elsewhere in 1982<sup>72</sup>. This classification process is inconsistent with how all other refugees in the world are classified, including the definition used by the UNHCR<sup>73</sup>.

Under Article I(c)(3) of the 1951 U.N. Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, a person shall cease to be considered a refugee if he or she “has acquired a new nationality, and enjoys the protection of the country of his new nationality.”<sup>74</sup> UNRWA’s definition of a Palestinian refugee ignores this clause<sup>75</sup>; according to UNRWA’s own website “...most of the over 2 million Palestine refugees in Jordan have been granted citizenship...” but UNRWA continues to count them as refugees<sup>76</sup>

## Incitement

A 2017 report by UN Watch<sup>77</sup> found examples of UNRWA teachers actively promoting antisemitic messages that constituted at least five legal violations. In 2015, similar reports<sup>78,79</sup> exposed 30 cases of online incitement from UNRWA staff.

The 2017 UN Watch report<sup>80</sup> exposed 60 Facebook pages operated by UNRWA schools, school teachers, principals, and other employees of UNRWA, which incite to terrorism or antisemitism. The report states “The promotion of racial hatred and violence by UNRWA staff constitutes a gross breach of their neutrality obligations as enshrined in the UN Charter and in UN and UNRWA Staff Rules and Regulations. Even more alarming than the Facebook posts themselves, however, is the fact that UNRWA hires and employs racist staff, and places the education of impressionable Palestinian youth in their hands.”<sup>81</sup>

UNRWA’s spokesman, Chris Gunness, originally responded to the UN Watch report by saying “Where we find credible allegations of neutrality violations among our staff, we investigate and where it’s appropriate we take disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal”<sup>82</sup> but he then proceeded to attack UN Watch and refused to comment further about any possible dismissals<sup>83</sup>.

There have been no other statements, investigations or actions by Mr Guinness or the UN into UNRWA promotion of terror. There have been some attempts to change the curriculum. In 2012, Hamas said it strongly opposed UNRWA's alleged intention once again to introduce Holocaust studies into the curriculum of the schools<sup>84</sup>. Teaching of the Holocaust is still not in the curriculum.

A 2017 study by Drs Groiss and Shaked for the Simon Wiesenthal Centre and Middle East Forum<sup>85</sup> found that UNRWA used school books where “attitudes to Jews, Israel and peace is based on three fundamentals: De-legitimization, demonization and indoctrination to violent struggle instead of peace.” Examples of extreme anti-Israel and anti-Jewish sentiments include referring to Jews as “greedy” and “oppressive”; representing Jewish Holy sites, such as the Temple Mount and Rachel’s Tomb, as “Muslim holy places usurped by the Jews”; and not recognising Israel as a sovereign state or showing it on maps<sup>86</sup>.

That work was updated in 2018 following a project run by the Palestinian Authority to publish new school textbooks that are also used by UNRWA. In total 118 textbooks were reviewed and showed they continue expressing, and in some instances by radicalizing, the same basic principles that appeared in previous textbooks: the delegitimizing of the State of Israel, demonizing the State of Israel, encouraging violence against it and an absence of education for peace<sup>87</sup>.

## **New Zealand Support for UNRWA**

### **Funding**

Over the past decade, New Zealand taxpayers have contributed more than NZ\$10,000,000 to UNRWA<sup>88</sup>. This includes an annual contribution of around NZ\$1,000,000 and additional emergency relief funding.

In May 2019, the Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations, Craig Hawke, reaffirmed New Zealand’s commitment to UNRWA at the signing of a pledge of \$3,000,000 of Kiwi taxpayer donations<sup>89</sup>, saying “New Zealand is proud to continue our long-standing commitment to UNRWA and to Palestinian refugees.” At the same meeting, Mr Krähenbühl, who is at the centre of the current allegations of abuse and corruption<sup>90</sup>, said “UNRWA is proud to partner with the Government of New Zealand.”

### **Political support**

No New Zealand Minister or official has publicly condemned any of the gross inefficiencies, UNRWA staff inciting and supporting terror, the use of UNRWA facilities as militant bases, or allegations of corruption, except in 2016 when Foreign Minister Murray McCully was directly asked in a public interview about the weapons found in and fired from UNRWA schools<sup>91</sup>. Other than that single comment, there has only been public support for the agency from New Zealand officials.

This includes a 2015 statement on the anniversary of the founding of UNRWA delivered by Phillip Taula<sup>92</sup>, Deputy Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations, which talked of the “essential role” UNRWA plays.

The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) advice given to Ministers on how to vote at the UN<sup>93</sup>, given that there are four annually recurring resolutions that praise UNRWA at the UNGA<sup>94</sup>, is also only positive toward UNRWA and does not present Ministers with any of the controversies.

### **New Zealand Official’s Knowledge of Controversy**

Information obtained by The Israel Institute of New Zealand (IINZ) from MFAT under the Official Information Act shows that there is some awareness of the controversies, but an apparent lack of will to publicly acknowledge or address them. This may be, in part, due to political considerations outlined by MFAT staff that suggest New Zealand foreign policy is not as ‘independent’ as Prime Minister Ardern has stated<sup>95</sup>.

A total of 119 pages of correspondence was obtained by IINZ in response to a request for all documents held where there were “....concerns about UNRWA have been raised with the government - particularly around corruption within the organisation, the promotion of extremism within the school curriculum, UNRWA staff working for or aiding terror activities, or UNRWA facilities being used for terror activities - and the responses to those concerns.”

The data were limited to those documents since 01 June 2017 at the request of MFAT, so may not include discussions around some of the more recent reported incidents or incidents before mid-2017. However, there was no attempt at independent analysis or research, and no mention of the publicly available reports that clearly show links to terror, the perpetuation of the conflict, and egregious antisemitism taught to children.

### **Knowledge of corruption and inefficiencies**

Rt Hon Minister Peters was asked about the latest allegations of corruption and abuse including UNRWA’s chief, Pierre Krähenbühl<sup>96</sup>, to which he responded “We are aware of recent media reports of allegations of ethical issues and mismanagement within UNRWA. We expect UNRWA to cooperate fully with any investigation and to report back on the investigation’s findings and recommendations.”<sup>97</sup>

After seeing a draft copy of this report, MFAT responded by saying “New Zealand will not make any further payments to UNRWA until we have reviewed the report’s findings and assessed UNRWA’s response to any recommendations.”<sup>98</sup>

An email from MFAT staff in New York on 09 September 2018 about “UNRWA: Further request for reporting following US funding cuts”, reported that “[MFAT staff in New York] took the opportunity to seek views on UNRWA's performance. **Colleagues had nothing negative to say. [redacted] dismissed [redacted] criticisms, stating that UNRWA, ably led by Commissioner-General Krahenbuhl, had proven itself to be effective and efficient.** [Redacted] commended the agency's work and said UNRWA would continue to be a priority item.” [emphasis added]



Another email on 10 September included "[redacted] does not agree with recent references to UNRWA being "organisationally flawed", and another on 13 September reported that "On UNRWA's performance, [redacted]... had undertaken an internal, desk-based review in 2015... [and] concluded that UNRWA's performance was acceptable in the context of a challenging set of circumstances... [redacted] is considering how a substantive UNRWA reform agenda might be successfully pursued, something it considers a priority. **Budget and governance accountability are key areas of concern for [redacted]**... [redacted] has not yet made decisions around additional funding, or how it might best pursue a substantive reform agenda. **Like us, it is looking to gather information about global reactions to the cessation of United States funding to UNRWA...**" [emphasis added]. This suggests that MFAT is more concerned about 'global reactions' than making a truly independent decision, and the redaction of the countries consulted raises questions about which politics are involved.

### Knowledge of UNRWA promotion of terror

In 2016 when Foreign Minister Murray McCully was directly asked about the weapons found in and fired from UNRWA schools<sup>99</sup>, he did criticise the practice and pointed out that the situation worsened when UNRWA officials, partly funded by New Zealand, had handed the weapons back to those who could fire them<sup>100,101</sup>.

However, when IINZ asked for comment from Foreign Minister Rt Hon Winston Peters about UNRWA controversies, the response was "New Zealand monitors the performance of UN multilateral agencies through review of annual reporting and achievement of results against strategy, evaluations by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, and feedback from other donors and independent reviews.... The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) maintains policies and protocols to prevent, identify and monitor any breaches in the use of funding and has demonstrated transparency on these matters..."<sup>102</sup>.

On 25 September, MFAT staff in Cairo reported that "At this time more than ever, we would argue New Zealand needs to be strengthening its core support to UNRWA [redacted]. Increased support would not only demonstrate our commitment to the international rules-based order, but **would also be well received by partners who are closely watching the international response to UNRWA's funding crisis. In particular [redacted] would value a demonstrable commitment to regional security and stability by New Zealand...**", suggesting that New Zealand contributions to UNRWA are given in part for political reasons. MFAT staff repeated the idea that UNRWA contributes to peace and security in media lines provided to the Minister of Foreign Affairs on 09 March, 2019.

MFAT officials also seemed to accept the UNRWA Commissioner-General's statements reported in a memo of 31 January, 2018, that "...UNRWA was firmly committed to neutrality (they had condemned Hamas and sealed tunnels when discovered beneath UNRWA schools)..." without much more question. There was no mention of repeated historic support for terror, including the comments of Mr McCully<sup>103</sup> or any apparent desire to confirm the actions Mr Krähenbühl reported.

## **Knowledge of UNRWA perpetuating the conflict**

There was a reference to the unique UNRWA definition of refugees in an email from MFAT staff in New York on 21 November, 2018. The internal memo was just following a meeting between MFAT staff and UNRWA Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl, and states that "...Krahenbul outlined that UNRWA's recognition of descendants was fully in line with international law, General Assembly resolutions set by member states, and the practice of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), which does the same for refugees in protracted crises. The UN has recently published a policy position supporting this... He responded to comments made about refugees' right of return, neutrality of the Agency, and arguments that the curriculum taught in UNRWA schools was biased." There is no attempt to seek more information or to challenge UNRWA..

There was no mention of the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees in any of the documents provided by MFAT or the historic changes to the UNRWA definition or of the Jordanian citizenship that more than two million refugees hold<sup>104,105</sup>.

There was no reference to a complete lack of legal precedent for the "right of return"<sup>106</sup> or the comments of Dr Wilf<sup>107</sup> or Minister Cassis<sup>108</sup>.

There was no mention in any of the 119 pages, either, of UN Watch or its CEO, Mr Hillel Neuer, despite IINZ being aware that MFAT staff met with Mr Neuer in 2015. After MFAT were given a draft copy of this report, they admitted that "Our records indicate that MFAT's last meeting with UN Watch CEO Mr Hillel Neuer was in August 2015. There is no file note of this meeting..."<sup>109</sup>.

There was also no mention of a meeting between MFAT staff and AIJAC Executive Director, Dr Colin Rubenstein, in December 2018, at which IINZ understands the issue of UNRWA's unique definition<sup>110</sup> was raised. After MFAT were given a draft copy of this report, they acknowledged that "further searches of our records have identified an email that may be relevant to your prior OIA request". MFAT also admitted that "There is no file note of... the roundtable with Dr Rubenstein in December 2018"<sup>111</sup>.

## **Knowledge of incitement within UNRWA**

An internal MFAT memo of 24 January, 2018, referred to an assessment of UNRWA compiled by the Dutch government that found "UNRWA scores a 'good' for combatting corruption... there is nothing in the assessment about alleged complicity with 'terrorism' acts or anti-Jewish bias in educational materials/teachings."

There is no reference to the UN Watch reports<sup>112,113,114</sup> which detail (with screenshots) the antisemitism and incitement in UNRWA schools by teachers and staff, no mention of the research conducted by Drs Groiss and Shaked<sup>115</sup>, and no attempt at independent analysis of the available information or requests for copies of textbooks.

## **Missing information**

IINZ followed up the OIA to give MFAT a chance to include any notes about the meeting with Mr Neuer, with Dr Rubenstein, or any other concerns that may not have been included in

their correspondence. They replied: "We have reviewed the material and confirm that we do not hold any additional information that falls within the scope of your original request. We confirm that officials in New Zealand have undertaken meetings pertaining to budgetary issues in UNRWA, for instance officials met with the Palestinian Head of Delegation Izzat Abdulhadi in February 2018 and the operational implications of funding cuts to UNRWA were discussed. None of the concerns outlined in your OIA request were covered and we do not hold any written reporting on that meeting. Given recent developments, we have sought additional reporting from relevant Posts since the date of your request. We are aware of recent media reports of allegations of ethical issues and mismanagement within UNRWA. We expect UNRWA to cooperate fully with the investigation of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and to report back on the investigation's findings and recommendations." This suggests that the meetings where UNRWA was criticised were not recorded for some reason and some emails were not included in the OIA release

## **Position of New Zealand's traditional allies**

### **United States**

The United States used to donate \$364 million annually to UNRWA<sup>116</sup>. In 2018, members of Congress introduced a bill asking that with respect to refugees under UNRWA the policy of the United States should be consistent with the definition of a refugee, such that "derivative refugee status may only be extended to the spouse or minor child of such a refugee" and "an alien who was firmly resettled in any country is not eligible to retain refugee status."<sup>117</sup>

That same bill not only highlighted the unique UNRWA definition of a refugee, but it also drew attention to the fact that UNRWA had "40 times the allocation of relief workers" when compared to UNHCR, that "UNRWA facilities have been used to launch terror attacks against Israel and UNRWA employees have frequently faced credible charges of working with terrorist groups"<sup>118</sup>.

Also in 2018, the US announced they would no longer fund UNRWA, citing the lack of international support and a disproportionate burden on the US as well as calling UNRWA an "irredeemably flawed operation" with a "fundamental business model and fiscal practices" that are unsustainable<sup>119</sup>.

US concerns had been aired for many years. A 2006 letter<sup>120</sup> written to Condoleezza Rice from Congressmen Mark Kirk and Steven Rothman stated, "... it is clear UNRWA is wrought by mismanagement, ineffective policies, and failure to secure its finances."

In response to the latest allegations of corruption and abuse, the White House demanded information on any misuse of American funds<sup>121</sup>.

### **Canada**

In 2010, under former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Canada halted its funding to UNRWA, based in part on the organization's ties to Hamas<sup>122</sup>. In November 2016, however, Prime Minister Trudeau's government announced its decision to reinstate

funding to UNRWA with a \$25 million grant<sup>123</sup>.

A review of the internal Canadian government communications around the reestablishment of UNRWA funding shows that the government largely dismissed allegations against UNRWA, claiming that they were unfounded or had been addressed, without explaining why or how<sup>124</sup>.

In response to the latest allegations of corruption and abuse, a Canadian MP tweeted “Another UN corruption scandal. Why are we sending Canadian taxpayers’ hard-earned money to this dysfunctional organization?”<sup>125</sup>.

## **Australia**

The Australian government donates \$80 million annually to UNRWA<sup>126,127</sup>. Following the latest allegations of abuse, discrimination and the incitement of violence towards Israelis, the Australian government said it was aware of the investigations and would consider the results before deciding what action to take<sup>128</sup>.

## **EU nations**

In relation to the latest allegations of “sexual misconduct, nepotism, retaliation, discrimination and other abuses of authority, for personal gain, to suppress legitimate dissent, and to otherwise achieve their personal objectives.”<sup>129</sup>, The Netherlands, Switzerland, and Belgium announced they were suspending payments UNRWA<sup>130,131</sup>.

The Czech government called out “misuse of power” by UNRWA management, and called for a thorough investigation<sup>132</sup>.

Switzerland’s foreign minister, Ignazio Cassis, had previously said UNRWA is “part of the problem” because it “is unrealistic that this dream [of return] will be fulfilled”<sup>133</sup>.

In 2018, the EU urged UNRWA to reform its operations and “engage in a transformative process” that would increase efficiencies and reduce costs<sup>134</sup>. There was no acknowledgement of the other UNRWA controversies in that statement.

## **Recommendations**

The UNRWA mandate is ratified by the United Nations General Assembly and receives overwhelming support there, along with the disproportionate number of anti-Israel resolutions passed each year<sup>135</sup>. New Zealand is also a minor donor to UNRWA<sup>136</sup>. Thus, it would be naive to think that New Zealand could, alone, completely reform UNRWA.

However, New Zealand has spoken of a need for reform within the United Nations<sup>137</sup>. While those comments have focussed on the Security Council resolution, UNRWA is one area that does seem in serious need of reform and where New Zealand taxpayer money could be used as some leverage. Leadership on this issue from New Zealand would be in keeping with an ‘independent’ foreign policy that was committed to principles of democracy, human rights, non-violence, and fairness.

MFAT clearly state that they are “committed to making our aid effective and to delivering value for investment of taxpayer funds. International best practice and the global development agenda inform the way we work... We deliver value for money by focusing our aid to have meaningful impact, and invest in initiatives only where the anticipated economic and social benefits exceed the costs.”<sup>138</sup>

It is time that New Zealand showed some international leadership and at least acknowledge the corruption within UNRWA, the ties to terror, perpetuation of the conflict, and incitement are significant costs.

Avoidance of waste is a key consideration of international aid, according to the MFAT “Value for Money” guidelines<sup>139</sup>. This would include corruption and so New Zealand should suspend funding to UNRWA until there is assurance that the current and historic allegations have been appropriately dealt with. This should include a detailed audit of and better accountability for the “cash assistance” program.

The links with terror and the incitement within UNRWA school textbooks does not seem to be in keeping with the human rights guidelines MFAT use in considering aid<sup>140</sup>. New Zealand should suspend funding to UNRWA until they can commit to revising the textbooks and removing the egregious incitement, and when there are robust procedures for dealing with incitement from staff. This should include an instant dismissal of any Hamas-affiliated staff.

Similarly, New Zealand should suspend funding to UNRWA until it abandons its determined campaign for a “right of return”. New Zealand cannot support the automatic immigration of approximately 5.5 million Arab Palestinians into Israel and continue to also support a peaceful two-state solution. The two positions are mutually exclusive.

Continuing to count people with citizenship as “refugees” is not consistent with the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees<sup>141</sup>. New Zealand should suspend funding to UNRWA until there is a determination that support will be offered only to genuine refugees. New Zealand should insist that UNRWA transfer responsibility for those people who are not refugees according to the UN Convention to other parties as soon as possible<sup>142</sup>. New Zealand could redirect aid to those organisations to show a commitment to the wellbeing of people as well as signal that we will no longer tolerate double standards.

We also recommend that New Zealand cease voting in favour of the four annual resolutions in the United Nations General Assembly which praise UNRWA unless there are amendments that also impress a need for urgent reform. And that New Zealand work with allied countries to similarly change their voting and funding patterns.

Before the most recent allegations of corruption, New Zealand committed to funding UNRWA until the end of 2021<sup>143</sup>. It is time for New Zealand to reconsider ongoing, unconditional support for UNRWA.

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