



UNRWA is Our Right until We Return

The Global Palestinian Refugee Network and

The Coalition for Social and Economic Rights

While Israel continues to deprive Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) of their right to reparations, including return, property restitution and compensation, and while the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) faces a chronic financial crisis that compromises the level and quality of services due for refugees, political pressure, particularly by the US Administration, continues to be placed on the UNRWA in an attempt to thwart this international agency, and consequently undermine the issue and rights of Palestinian refugees and IDPs.

The chronic financial crisis, which has plagued the UNRWA since its inception, is an outcome of its structural deficiency as an agency as it is forced to rely on voluntary contributions of states. This has made the Agency subject to political blackmail and changes in the balance of power. Funding deficiencies have directly impacted the level and quality of UNRWA services, causing a deeper humanitarian crisis, expanding protection gap experienced by refugees, and depriving refugees of basic services, particularly health and education. Funding cuts have driven the UNRWA to dismiss thousands of employees in all its five areas of operation.

By terminating, conditioning or obstructing funding and calling for the dismantling of the Agency, these pressures aim to transform the UNRWA into an ineffective formal agency, like the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, which was established under Resolution 194 of 1948. The Commission was mandated to provide protection to refugees and their properties and enable them to return to their homes at the earliest practicable date.

The creation and evolution of the funding crisis is intrinsically linked to political developments and Israel's calls to terminate the Agency. These calls have escalated in the context of the "Deal of the Century". Not only has the US Administration cut funding to the UNRWA but it is also working to transfer the international community's responsibilities towards Palestinian refugees to Arab countries. This is accomplished by transferring the international community's financial obligations to Arab Gulf states, as well as UNRWA's programmatic responsibilities to host countries or other international or civil society organisations.

Simultaneously, the Israeli Knesset's approved the Nation-State Law, which restricts the right of self-determination in Palestine to the Jews and paves the way for formal annexation of Palestinian land. All the while, Israel continues to deprive Palestinian refugees and IDPs, the indigenous population, of their inalienable rights, the right to reparations and self-determination.

Against this background, the Global Palestinian Refugee Network and the Coalition for Social and Economic Rights, announce the launch of the campaign *UNRWA is OUR Right until We Return*. This campaign highlights UNRWA's crisis and demands that duty bearers and decision makers on the national and international levels fulfil their responsibilities towards the Palestinian people, particularly refugees and IDPs.

The campaign calls on all national and international actors to engage in popular activities and advocacy events, continuously and incrementally throughout 2019 as the renewal of UNRWA's mandate will start at the June 2019 of the session of the United Nations General Assembly.

We call for protection of refugee and IDP rights through the protection of UNRWA by:

1. Providing an urgent budget to the UNRWA as this is an international, rather than an Arab, responsibility, particularly of the UN itself. The UN is principally responsible for creating the issue of Palestinian refugees and is bound to provide international protection.
2. Converting state contributions to the UNRWA budget from voluntary to mandatory contributions. These should be earmarked by the General Assembly as part of its annual budget, ensuring the provision of a minimum annual budget, which the UNRWA needs to carry out its core programs (education, health care and social services).
3. Expanding UNRWA's mandate to enable it to provide the required international (humanitarian, legal and physical) protection to Palestinian refugees in all their places of residence.
4. Ensuring that UNRWA is not involved in any political deal and reaffirming the commitment to the rights-based approach to resolving the issue of Palestinian refugees. This particularly includes implementation of the UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948 and UN Security Council Resolution 237 of 1967.
5. Defending UNRWA's existence and programs, and rejecting transference of its tasks to host countries through international grants, including to the Palestinian Authority, or to international or civil society organisations.
6. Refusing the reduction measures that the UNRWA might be forced to take due to the existing budget deficit. This will be addressed by supporting the UNRWA and channelling political, diplomatic and popular action to hold the UN and international community responsible.

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