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Israel's parliament votes to ban UNRWA

Israel's parliament has passed two bills aimed at preventing the UN's agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA) from being able to continue operating in Israel. The agency is the largest aid provider in the Gaza Strip, where Israel has been waging a devastating war for over a year.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres [said](#) that UNRWA is the “principal means by which essential assistance is supplied” to Palestinian refugees in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and that the implementation of the bills could have “devastating consequences”.

“If UNRWA is unable to operate, it'll likely see the collapse of the humanitarian system in Gaza,” the head of UNICEF [warned](#). “So a decision such as this suddenly means that a new way has been found to kill children.”

Nearly the entire population of Gaza has been forcibly displaced by Israel's military campaign, many multiple times, and virtually everyone is dependent on utterly insufficient amounts of aid allowed into the enclave by Israel. More than 43,000 Palestinians have been killed, including nearly 17,000 children, according to health officials in Gaza.

The first of the two bills, which passed in Israel's parliament on 28 October, bans UNRWA from operating on Israeli soil. The second severs ties between Israel and the agency, banning Israeli government employees from communicating with UNRWA and stripping the agency's staff of diplomatic immunities.

The bills, which will go into effect in 90 days, will likely prevent UNRWA from operating in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where the agency's headquarters is located, because Israel controls access to the occupied Palestinian territories.

In addition to providing emergency humanitarian aid, UNRWA runs schools, hospitals, healthcare clinics, microfinance programmes, development projects, and other programmes that serve some 5.9 million Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Palestinian territories, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

The agency has long been controversial in Israel because it is seen as perpetuating the right and aspirations of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to return to the territory they were displaced from by the creation of Israel in 1948.