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UNRWA's lifesaving aid may end due to funding suspension

Over 2 million people in Gaza depend on UNRWA for survival as war and displacement continue

From Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA Commissioner General

AMMAN, 27 January 2024- “Nine countries have as of today temporarily suspended their funding to UNRWA. These decisions threaten our ongoing humanitarian work across the region including and especially in the Gaza Strip.

“It is shocking to see a suspension of funds to the Agency in reaction to allegations against a small group of staff, especially given the immediate action that UNRWA took by terminating their contracts and asking for a transparent independent investigation. The United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the highest investigative authority in the UN system, has already been seized of this very serious matter.

“UNRWA is the primary humanitarian agency in Gaza, with over 2 million people depending on it for their sheer survival. Many are hungry as the clock is ticking towards a looming famine. The Agency runs shelters for over 1 million people and provides food and primary healthcare even at the height of the hostilities.

“In its ruling yesterday, the International Court of Justice ordered that *“Israel must take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip”*. These measures are aimed at preventing irreparable damage to the rights of Palestinians.

“The only way that this can be done is through cooperation with international partners, especially UNRWA as the largest humanitarian actor in Gaza. Some 3,000 core staff out of 13,000 in Gaza continue to report to work, giving their communities a lifeline which can collapse anytime now due to lack of funding.

“It would be immensely irresponsible to sanction an Agency and an entire community it serves because of allegations of criminal acts against some individuals, especially at a time of war, displacement and political crises in the region.

“UNRWA shares the list of all its staff with host countries every year, including Israel. The Agency never received any concerns on specific staff members.

“Meanwhile, an investigation by OIOS into the heinous allegations will establish the facts. Moreover, as I announced on 17 January, an independent review by external experts will help UNRWA strengthen its framework for the strict adherence of all staff to the humanitarian principles.

“I urge countries who have suspended their funding to re-consider their decisions before UNRWA is forced to suspend its humanitarian response. The lives of people in Gaza depend on this support and so does regional stability”.

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