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Eliminating U.S. Aid to Terrorists

*Excerpts of Opening Remarks by Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ)
Chairman of the Subcommittee on Global Health,
Global Human Rights and International Organizations
May 16, 2024*

This hearing on the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)—its decades long complicity in the most vicious forms of antisemitic hate with a focus today on the so-called independent review by Ms. Catherine Colonna—will come to order.

Hillel Neuer, Executive Director of UN Watch, will [testify today](#) that the:

“Colonna Review Was Not Independent, Verdict Determined in Advance. UN Watch has demonstrated in detail why the Colonna Review was not truly independent, including because of the manifest bias and conflicts of interests of the examiners, and because both the UN and UNRWA declared the outcome in advance, in a mandate explicitly designed not to objectively examine potential wrongdoing, but rather to ‘reassure the donors.’”

The revelations of recent months, about UNRWA’s complicity in the antisemitic atrocities of October 7 and involvement in supplying Hamas and protecting its terror tunnels, has been a dramatic wake-up call for a lot of people to the reality that UNRWA is one of the chief drivers of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis.

This is the fourth hearing on UNRWA and related UN agencies that I’ve chaired in the past twelve months – this is because we are making significant progress on a major issue.

Twenty-one years ago, in 2003, I offered an [amendment](#) that passed the House to defund UNRWA. The Senate failed to take action.

This year, my legislation, the [Stop Support for UNRWA Act of 2024](#), was passed by the Foreign Affairs Committee on February 6 by a vote of 30-19. It completely prohibits any U.S. contributions to UNRWA.

My legislation made absolutely clear however that:

“Nothing in this Act may be construed to preclude the provision of humanitarian assistance through any agency or entity other than UNRWA to individuals or entities that also receive assistance from UNRWA if the Secretary of State certifies to Congress that such other agency or entity—

(1) does not promote, espouse, or affiliate with entities or individuals that promote violence, terrorism, or antisemitism, as such term is defined by the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism; and

(2) does not employ individuals who promote, espouse, or affiliate with such entities or individuals.”

The House Report accompanying [H.R. 7122—Stop Support for UNRWA Act of 2024](#) summarizes the case against UNRWA and the due diligence by the Foreign Affairs Committee including hearings prior to markup.

In March, the bipartisan foreign aid bill that became law included language prohibiting U.S. aid to UNRWA through March 25, 2025.

Before the prohibition took effect, the Biden Administration was contributing nearly 30 percent of UNRWA’s budget.

This progress would not have happened without hard work by a lot of people including Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart, and many of whom are in this room, most outstandingly by some of our witnesses, who have worked tirelessly to research, document and educate the world on UNRWA and its real relationship with terrorism, and as **the major obstacle** to peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

So thank you, Mr. Lindsey – you were really the pioneer here, with the [analysis and exposé](#) you wrote in 2009, and thank you Hillel and Yona, for your stellar work and dedication in carefully documenting and informing us about the antisemitic and destructive work of the UN and many of the NGO networks that the UN partners with.

Thanks to your work we see a shift. More and more people in Congress and government are aware of the irreformable problems with UNRWA. It’s by staying with this issue that Congress will effect change, and eventually the effective elimination of UNRWA. When that happens, it will be a very good thing for all the peoples of the Middle East, whether Israeli, Palestinian, or any of the countries that maintain UNRWA missions.

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Our agenda for this hearing is twofold. First, we have to examine the Colonna Report—which was set up solely to whitewash UNRWA’s record—and, second, the U.S. funding to organizations other than UNRWA, which are affiliated to terrorists or otherwise promote violence against Israelis.

Regarding the Colonna report, it was in response to growing criticism of UNRWA, as well as Israel’s announcement that it had evidence that UNRWA employees had participated in the atrocities of October 7, that the UN announced an “independent review” of UNRWA.

The mandate of the review, however, was restricted to UNRWA’s “neutrality” procedures, in order to avoid going into UNRWA’s obligation to be independent and impartial, where it would have been impossible to hide its grotesque failures.

Secretary-General Guterres appointed Catherine Colonna, a former French foreign minister, to lead the review. Colonna has a long history of support for UNRWA and hostility toward Israel. Ms. Colonna tapped three organizations to conduct the review – all of them have similar histories, including of throwing defamatory accusations such as *genocide* and *apartheid* at Israel. Senior officials connected to the report repeatedly stated that their goal was to “reassure donors” and “provide the donors with further cover.”

Yet the report is still interesting as another sign of changed times. The authors felt it necessary to make some concessions and admissions. Most of its 50 recommendations are strictly small-ball items to remedy management deficiencies, which anyway have been repeatedly brought to public attention by our witnesses and other watchdog groups and ignored by UNRWA, for decades. Yet the Colonna report concedes that UNRWA does **not vet employees for connections or sympathies with Hamas or Islamic Jihad.**

The Colonna report concludes that UNRWA is “irreplaceable and indispensable.”

As Mr. Lindsay says in his written testimony, “It is simply not true that UNRWA is ‘irreplaceable’. In every UNRWA field of operation the local authorities provide services... to those of their residents who are not defined as ‘Palestine Refugees’ by UNRWA... These local authorities, if UNRWA’s resources eventually were transferred to them, would simply expand their operations...”

UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency, was set up in 1949 to provide aid to refugees – 74 years later it is kept going by the UN General Assembly. There are few of the original refugees left – almost all UNRWA so-called refugees today in fact belong to the vastly expanded number of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the original refugees, and they are only refugees because nearby Arab nations, seeking to perpetuate Israel’s problems, will not permit the Palestinians to integrate into their societies.

UNRWA's textbooks, curricula, summer camps, official media all exist to perpetuate the problem, inflaming them with hatred of Israel and the ideology of returning to their ancestors' villages – where they will continue to wage war on Israel. UNRWA is an incubator of hatred and a child-soldier factory. Aspects of its propaganda are so twisted I won't describe them here – but its publicly available materials encourage children to “martyrdom” as suicide-bombers – the worst form of child abuse.

UN Watch has published many pages of documentation on over 100 UNRWA teachers and their Facebook pages inciting to antisemitism and praise of jihadi terrorism that makes grim reading. UN Watch has also revealed how “as soon as news of the horrific slaughter broke, which was livestreamed on social media by some of the terrorists, United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff immediately celebrated and justified it on Facebook.”

UNRWA bears a heavy moral responsibility for the perversity we saw performed by Hamas in its October 7 invasion of Israel.

I think the best thing for Palestinians and Israelis would be for the U.S. to pursue a two-track strategy: first, continue down the path of prohibiting U.S. funding to UNRWA – that is the path that the Trump Administration took in 2018, and that my legislation re-established after the Biden Administration restored funding in 2021.

Second, the U.S. should develop alternate ways to deliver aid to Palestinians – international aid organizations that are rigorously vetted by our government, to be kept clean of associations with antisemitic or terroristic associations.

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This brings us to the second agenda item, U.S. funding to organizations other than UNRWA that are affiliated to terrorists or otherwise promote violence against Israelis. Congress is not voting to prohibit funding to UNRWA in order to have aid to the Palestinians channeled through other terror-complicit organizations.

Yet that seems to be happening. I don't know why the Biden administration is permitting this – yet it's been unresponsive to concerns I raised about this [last September](#). At that time it became clear that the State Department awarded a grant to an organization whose web page showed ample evidence of working with and celebrating senior leaders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)—both of which the US Government has designated as [Foreign Terrorist Organizations](#).

We will learn about other examples during the course of the hearing today. One thing is clear: under absolutely no circumstances should the State Department be subsidizing an organization that promotes the killing of innocent Jews and terror attacks on Israel.