



The Case Against UNRWA

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Submitted to the Hearing on:
“UNRWA Exposed: Examining the Agency’s Mission and Failures”

**The House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
&
Subcommittee on Global Health, Global Human Rights,
and International Organizations**

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Chairman Mast, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Crow, Ranking Member Wild, and distinguished members of both subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing.

I come here today to present a new report by my organization, United Nations Watch, which exposes the Telegram chat group of 3,000 UNRWA teachers that celebrated and encouraged the Hamas massacre of October 7th, and other acts of Jihadi terrorism.

My purpose is to make the case that UNRWA is not, at it claims to be, a humanitarian agency that helps Palestinians, but rather, on the contrary, in the words of Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis: “UNRWA has become part of the problem. It supplies the ammunition to continue the conflict. By supporting UNRWA, we keep the conflict alive. It’s a perverse logic.”

I would like to ask that my full statement be ordered part of the record.

Hamas Attacks Did Not Happen in A Vacuum: They Had UNRWA Teachers

On October 24th, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated that the Hamas massacre of October 7th “did not happen in a vacuum.” He was right. The attacks were perpetrated by Palestinians who for generations were indoctrinated with hatred.

As we have shown in numerous reports over the past decade, teachers and schools at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which runs education and social services for Palestinians, regularly call to murder Jews, and create teaching materials that glorify terrorism, encourage martyrdom, demonize Israelis and incite antisemitism.¹

For example, we reported how in May 2022, UNRWA teacher Elham Mansour, posted this on Facebook: *“By Allah, anyone who can kill and slaughter any Zionist and Israeli criminal, and doesn’t do so, doesn’t deserve to live. Kill them and pursue them everywhere, they are the greatest enemy. All Israel deserves is death.”*²

This is how Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere were educated in UNRWA schools, and that is exactly what the Hamas murderers and rapists did on October 7th.

In 2022 alone, UNRWA received \$344 million in U.S. funding. Yet a March 2023 report by UN Watch and Impact-SE identified 133 UNRWA educators and staff who were found to promote hate and violence on social media, and an additional 82 teachers and other staff affiliated with 30 UNRWA schools who were involved in drafting and distributing hateful content to students. The hatred is systemic at UNRWA, and its internal self-auditing mechanisms are not fit for purpose.³

¹ <https://unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023-Report-UNRWA.pdf>

² See UN Watch, *UNRWA’s Teachers of Hate*, June 2022, at 17 <https://unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-Report-UNRWAs-Teachers-of-Hate.pdf>.

³ <https://unwatch.org/un-teachers-call-to-murder-jews-reveals-new-report/>

UNRWA Refused to Take Action, Embarked on Campaign to Smear UN Watch

We repeatedly urged UNRWA to take action, but they refused. I wrote letters to UNRWA Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini, and to his predecessor Pierre Krahenbuhl, and requested to meet in order to share information about UNRWA teachers and other staff who support terrorism, but they refused to meet. Worse, UNRWA embarked on a strategy is to smear our organization for daring to hold them to account.

For example, In June 2022, even as UNRWA announced its suspension of six out of 10 UNRWA employees only days after they were exposed by UN Watch for promoting violence and hatred, Deputy Commissioner General Leni Stenseth, a former Norwegian diplomat, [informed](#) donor states that that “the real intent” of UN Watch is “to destroy, not build,” and “to invite conflict, not build a lasting peace.” She also falsely accused us of “coordinating comments” with “satellite organizations.” We didn’t coordinate the report with anyone, and we have no satellites. Sadly, the U.S. and other Western donor states, who are the stakeholders overseeing UNRWA, apparently made no objections to UNRWA’s repeated attacks on our organization.

New Report: UNRWA’s Telegram Group of 3,000 Teachers Celebrating Hamas Massacre of October 7th

On Friday, the U.S. announced that it was suspending funding to UNRWA over the news that at least a dozen of its employees were implicated in the massacre of October 7th.

Just the day before, however, the State Department had doubled down on its support for UNRWA, [saying](#) it would be allocated a “central” role in post-war Gaza.

Let us be clear: This is a mistake. We call on President Biden to recognize the truth about UNRWA: that it is inimical to the welfare of Palestinians, as well as to the very existence of the State of Israel.

I provided a glimpse into the nature of this organization, which employs 13,000 Palestinians in Gaza alone, in a January 10th [thread on X](#) that exposed a Telegram chat group of 3,000 UNRWA teachers that is replete with messages, photos and videos celebrating the Hamas massacre of October 7th, mixed with discussions by the educators about when to expect their next UNRWA salaries.

Since then, my colleagues at UN Watch have been diligently working with professional Arabic translators in sifting through more than 249,000 user posts in the chat group.

Today I have come to present our findings, contained in our new report, [UNRWA’s Terrorgram](#). It documents how UNRWA teachers celebrated the massacre of October 7th, and how they encourage and promote Hamas terrorism.

Although the position of UNRWA, in the [words](#) of spokesman Adnan Abu Hasna, is that “we don’t know who’s in this Telegram group” nor “whether these people work, or don’t work for UNRWA,” a quick review of the group, users and messages shows the opposite.

The title of the chat group offers the first hint: it’s called the “UNRWA-Gaza Daily Vacancies Telegram Group.” It was created by [Hani Jouda](#), who advocates for the rights of UNRWA staff. He is affiliated with the Palestine Refugee Advocacy Network, apparently connected to the PLO’s refugee affairs department.

In August 2022, Jouda was [photographed](#) with UNRWA Gaza Director Thomas White at a meeting about UNRWA services. On his blog, Jouda [quotes](#) antisemitic texts that portray Jews as having a superiority complex that “fills the being of every Jewish individual,” and as being “cunning” and “clever in evil.”

The purpose of [the Telegram group](#) is to coordinate negotiations for improved working conditions for UNRWA teachers on non-permanent contracts, though many of the group members have actually been working at the agency for years.

Many of the group discussions concern UNRWA salaries, schedules, and teaching materials. Users posted internal UNRWA documents, including confidential UNRWA employee lists with ID numbers, letters and memos on UNRWA letterhead, including from Mr. White, UNRWA’s Gaza Director. Teachers in the group shared photos and videos of activities in UNRWA schools, and posted answers to exam questions for UNRWA employee training, including for the exams on “ethics and integrity” and “social media neutrality.” (I shared several of these items in a [subsequent thread](#), and more are displayed in our new report.) In sum, the group is filled with insider information for and from UNRWA teachers.

Aside from Hani Jouda, there are 18 other administrators of the group, all of whom are presumably UNRWA teachers. Seven of these we positively identified as UNRWA staff using the employee charts uploaded to the chat.

For example, there is Safaa Mohammad Al Najjar, a highly active administrator in the group. When she’s not sharing charts of 1,750 UNRWA teachers, she’s praising terrorism against Jews. On the morning of October 7th, at 7:33 AM, Al Najjar excitedly celebrated the Hamas massacre. [Sharing](#) video footage of the attacks, she exclaimed, “Resistance on the roof of settlers’ houses,” and she added a red heart emoji. She [praised](#) the Hamas “holy warriors” (Mujahideen) as they massacred, mutilated and raped Israelis.

Another of the group administrators is UNRWA English teacher Abdallah Mehjaz. According to his [LinkedIn profile](#), he previously worked for the BBC. Posting to the UNRWA teachers group on October 13th, Mehjaz shared a message from the Hamas Interior Ministry, [urging](#) Gazans to stay put and ignore Israeli messages calling on them to evacuate for their safety. In other words, an UNRWA teacher was doing Hamas’ work urging Gaza civilians not to leave harm’s way, and instead to effectively serve as human shields.

Notwithstanding all their required “Neutrality” training, other UNRWA teachers serving as administrators in the group likewise have no compunction about pronouncing their support for the murder of Jews.

On the morning of October 7th, administrator Israa Abdul Kareem Mezher, posting under the username “Sun of Sunshine”, ecstatically celebrated the Hamas terrorists: “May Allah keep their feet steady and guide their aim”; “pray for the Mujahidin”; “Allah protect them and bring them back safe.” At 7:38 AM, as news of the Hamas atrocities began to spread, Mezher cheered, “God is the greatest God.”

When a group member wondered what these “heroes” were “brought up on,” Mezher replied: “They imbibed Jihad and resistance with their mothers’ milk.” At 8:15 AM,

commenting on a photo of a dead Hamas terrorist, he wrote: “Our martyrs are in heaven, and their [Israeli] dead are in hell.”

A few days later, on October 10th, this UNRWA teacher endorsed a call for Hamas to execute their Israeli hostages, sharing a statement by Hamas’ Al-Qassam Brigades spokesman Abu Obaida.

Our new report identifies more than 25 other UNRWA teachers in the chat group who celebrated Jihadi terrorism and the murder of Jews.⁴ All of the evidence can be seen on our website.⁵

Astonishingly, however, the American people are regularly assured by UNRWA officials that the agency operates “on the principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity.” So [wrote](#) Elizabeth Campbell in the *New York Times*, in April 2019, when she served as UNRWA’s chief lobbyist in Washington. Today, she’s the U.S. [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State](#) dealing with refugees.

The revolving door also goes the other way. I used to meet with [Ambassador Peter Mulrean](#) when he was United States Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva. I shared with him our concerns about the UN’s demonization of Israel. Two years later, I learned that he had joined UNRWA as their chief lobbyist in New York.

It may therefore come as little surprise that the State Department, which has doled out nearly \$1 billion to UNRWA since 2021, after Biden decided to restore funding to the agency, has never contacted UN Watch to request information about the 150 cases of incitement to terrorism that we have previously [exposed](#), perpetrated by the teachers and other UNRWA staffers who are funded by U.S. taxpayers.

In 2022, UNRWA received \$344 million from the United States. But other Western states are also major donors: \$202 million from Germany, \$114 million from the European Commission, \$61 million from Sweden, \$34 million from Norway, \$29 million from France, \$25 million from Switzerland, \$24 million from Canada, \$21 million from the UK, and \$21 million from the Netherlands. The sad reality is that our taxes are funding teachers of terrorism.

On January 10th, UN Watch’s exposé of the pro-Hamas UNRWA Telegram group was [reported](#) worldwide. As a result, the office of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres could not ignore it.

Yet rather than take responsibility for the fact that UNRWA systematically employs teachers who celebrate the murder of Jews, the first response of Mr. Guterres’ spokesman was to smear my organization — for doing the monitoring that the UN itself fails to do.

Asked at the daily press briefing on January 11th whether the UN was concerned, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric [replied](#): “I mean, UN Watch has a track record, and I think from our end, it speaks for itself...”

⁴ *UNRWA’s Terrorgram*, <https://unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/UN-Watch-UNRWA-Terrorgram-.pdf>

⁵ <https://unwatch.org/unrwa-terrorgram/>

This has been the modus operandi of the UN's top officials, and of UNRWA. When confronted by our meticulously supported evidence of their teachers promoting Jihadi terrorism and the murder of Jews, their immediate reaction was to kill the messenger and attack UN Watch.

UNRWA is Part of the Problem, Not the Solution

What happened in the UNRWA teachers' Telegram chat group on October 7th was not a surprise for anyone familiar with the agency. For nearly a decade, we have [documented](#) the genocidal antisemitism that is widespread among UNRWA's teachers in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

Until now, we had repeatedly called on UNRWA and its donor states to take remedial measures, including creating an independent inquiry, and firing the teachers of hate. Yet none of these measures has ever been pursued, let alone implemented.

Chairman Mast, Chairman Smith: Today we have reached the conclusion that UNRWA and its donors are clearly not interested in pursuing genuine reform.

For example, neither UNRWA nor any of the donor states ever contacted us following the publication of our January 10th exposé about the Telegram group. While the UN spokesman stated that the UN looks into "any allegations," UNRWA has never contacted us to request evidence. UN Watch has preserved copies of messages, photos, and videos from that chat group, many of which have been deleted by the users. No genuine investigation is possible without this information.

But it's not only that UNRWA is not interested in reform. After October 7th, it's time to stop pretending that UNRWA is at all fixable. The very existence of a Telegram group of 3,000 teachers in which members celebrate Hamas atrocities is but a symptom of the core problem of UNRWA: its true purpose is to undo the 1948 creation of Israel.

Dr. Einat Wilf, co-author of [The War of Return](#), is the world expert on UNRWA. As she [explains](#), the organization currently has two main goals: First, to keep a question mark over the Jewish state until there is a "return" of the millions of descendants of Palestinian refugees.

"That is the only thing that ends the refugee status, the end of Israel," says Wilf. "So this is an organization that keeps the conflict alive, generation after generation, until the Jews don't have a state anymore."

"The second goal, which became very clear in the wake of October 7, is to free up the murderers to be able to murder Israelis." In Gaza, UNRWA pays for and takes care of education, health and welfare, enabling Hamas to spend all their time, money and resources on weapons and terror tunnels.

I come back to the words of Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis, [said](#) in 2018, but valid today more than ever: "UNRWA has become part of the problem. It supplies the ammunition to continue the conflict. By supporting UNRWA, we keep the conflict alive. It's a perverse logic."

If the United States and other governments that fund UNRWA truly care about helping Palestinians and Israelis, it's time to end this perverse logic. Thank you.