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Defunding UNRWA: The Last Phase of Israeli Genocide



Image by Craig Manners.

International leaders who lined up to pledge their support for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu following the largest open-air prison break on October 7, 2023 had paved the way for the ensued Israeli war of genocide. Now, the suspension of funding to the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) for the Palestinian refugees, complements Netanyahu's physical genocide by exacerbating the looming Israeli-made famine and the hardship for the 2.3 million civilians.

UNRWA was created by the UN General Assembly in 1950 to provide Palestinian refugees with humanitarian services including schools, health clinics and other social services. The hasty freezing of financial aid by the US and other donor countries without first conducting independent investigations into the veracity of Israeli claims against UNRWA employees is cabalistic, adds to the Israeli blockade and deepens the suffering of the Gaza civilians.

Sky News, who have reviewed the Israeli dossier on the alleged “evidence” against UNRWA’s staff, has stated that it “has not seen proof of and many of the claims, even if true, do not directly implicate UNRWA.” Nevertheless, the Agency’s Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini summarily terminated the accused, without due process, possibly hoping to avert the very hyperbole reaction from the donor countries.

Meanwhile, the imprudent decision to halt funding for the largest and oldest UN agency serving Palestinians would likely lead to the malnourishment of young children. This decision will also impede UNRWA’s ability to deliver crucial humanitarian assistance to the 2 million displaced civilians, including 17,000 children who are unaccompanied or have been separated from their parents as a result of the Israeli pogrom in Gaza.

After all the damage is done, it may very well be that the Israeli claims against the UNRWA employees are either exaggerated or unfounded. It wouldn’t be different than the debunked Israeli disinformation regarding decapitated children, rape, sexual violence, and mutilation of women reported by the Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz on the October 7 events.

Having said that, even if Israeli allegations against a handful of low-level individuals held some validity, why should UNRWA be responsible for a conduct carried out by employees outside their working hours, and not associated with their work duties? In fact, in the more than 100 days of the Israel orgy of slaughter, UNRWA has lost 152 employees, a staggering 1300 percent more than the number of the accused staff. Keeping this in mind, one must question whether donor nations and UNRWA’s Commissioner considered the possibility that these allegations could be an Israeli gambit to deflect from its responsibility for murdering 152 UNRWA employees.

Now, let’s examine how donor nations responded to a sister UN organization, the Peacekeeping force, when staff faced accusations of misconduct. In 2021, the UN Secretary-General concluded that it was credible that 450 members of the Peacekeeping force in Gabon were guilty of child rape and sexual exploitation. Unlike UNRWA, however, the US and other donors did not suspend funding to the UN agency when reports of sexual abuse emerged, more importantly, they continued the funding even after the allegations were verified. Canada, for example, did not freeze its aid even after its own investigation accused the UN of “*glaring’ accountability gaps” in handling sexually abusing people they’ve been sent to protect.*”

Yet, immediately after Israel raised, yet to be verified, allegations against a very few of UNRWA staff, Canada and other donors preempted any investigation and froze funding to an organization that currently provides vital humanitarian assistance to a population enduring siege and relentless bombing.

As in the Western hypocrisy case on the war of genocide in Gaza, the incongruence response to the two UN Agencies reveals that Western virtue is gaged by the identity of the victim and victimizer. In response to the more than 2000 allegations of sexual abuse, the accusers were

from Africa and Haiti. In the second case, the unverified allegations against the 12 individuals came from Israel. The disparity in the two UN cases is a stark illustration of the evident Western bias, and how it's driven by the victims/victimizers' racial characteristics rather than a commitment to genuine fairness.

By immediately pausing UNRWA funding, Western donors indulge Israeli arrogance and its absurd obsession to discredit UNRWA's vital role in preventing starvation for the "less than equal" 2.3 million human beings. To the point where Israeli Minister of War Yoav Gallant equates UNRWA's humanitarian lifeline in Gaza to a war against Israel telling a delegation of UN ambassadors that UNRWA was " Hamas with a facelift ". Evoking his rhetoric on Israel's military objectives in Gaza, Israeli Prime Minister told the same delegation "UNRWA's mission has to end."

It's crucial to recognize that Israeli efforts to undermine UNRWA are not a recent development and are not necessarily linked to the current war on Gaza. For years, Israel has actively lobbied different US administrations to defund the UN agency. In 2017, after a meeting with the American UN ambassador, Nikki Haley, Netanyahu told reporters, "It is time UNRWA be dismantled..."

Israeli fixation to "end" UNRWA because the Agency has become a live registry of the Palestinian refugees who continue to challenge the 75-year-old Israeli diabolical prophecy. Following the Palestinian Nakba of 1948, an Israeli foreign ministry study had predicted that "*The most adaptable [Palestinians] and best survivors would 'manage' by a process of natural selection and others will waste away. Some will die but most will turn into human debris and social outcasts and probably join the poorest classes in the Arab countries.*"

In 2018, Israel succeeded when Trump heeded Netanyahu's demand and cut US aid to UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority (PA) after the PA rejected Trump/Kushner's steal of the century proposal. The defunding was rescinded by the Joe Biden Administration, however, bankrupting UNRWA remains Israel's last hope to turn the Palestinian refugees, "into ... social outcasts."

Undeniably UNRWA has provided Palestinian refugees with the basic humanitarian assistance to help them endure life in the miserable refugee camps. When I write on this subject, it's not merely an abstract academic analysis but it comes from my own personal experience, having grown up in one of those Palestinian refugee camps. For instance, the donor aid for UNRWA provided me, along with tens of thousands of children since 1950, the chance to attend school.

As someone who was raised in a refugee camp, I want to emphasize the significant impact defunding UNRWA would have on children growing up under similar conditions. The camps are among the most densely populated areas on our planet. In my camp, with a population exceeding 30,000 living in less than 0.2 sq miles, the absence of UNRWA funding would

mean that children wouldn't receive vaccinations against communicable diseases such as cholera, hepatitis, tuberculosis, polio, and many others.

A number of pupils in my own school had suffered from polio, at least two in my grade. I remember them clenching on forearm clutches lugging their flailing limbs to go from class to class, or sitting on the sidelines while we ran in the schoolyard. And those were still considered the fortunate ones, as many others had quietly faded away, losing their lives to other preventable diseases.

Without UNRWA, thousands of Palestinian refugee children, myself included, wouldn't have had the opportunity to attend school. I, for one, wouldn't have been able to eventually become a professional engineer, post graduate, an author, and most importantly, I wouldn't have had the chance to write about my own experiences as a Palestinian refugee. UNRWA's humanitarian role has been instrumental in shaping the futures of countless individuals in otherwise very challenging circumstances.

Perhaps, that's precisely why Israeli leaders want "UNRWA's mission ... to end." Over the past 73 years, UNRWA schools have played a crucial role in educating tens of thousands of Palestinian children, contributing to the emergence of one of the most educated groups in the Middle East. UNRWA's help made it possible for the refugee camps to extricate a highly educated progeny out of the fissures of catastrophe, thereby thwarting Israel's wish to relegate Palestinians into a "human debris."

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