



## United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees: Factsheet



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There have been many claims made against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Most of these allegations have been levelled against it by the Israeli government, certain lobby groups in the United States and Canada, as well as some politicians and political parties in the Western world, including in Canada. While UNRWA plays a vital role like no other organization can in providing life-saving services to Palestinian refugees in Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, its very existence is now in peril.

Over the past several decades, UNRWA has faced continuous threats to its funding from various Western countries, limitations to its work, as well as violence towards its employees. More recently, an important number of UNRWA staff have been attacked and killed, the organization's offices, cars, trucks, and equipment have been destroyed, UNRWA itself has been banned by the Israeli government, it has been defunded by the United States, and its activities have been severely restricted.

As part of the United Nations since its founding in 1949, UNRWA has very strict protocols that it must follow. Its work and structure have also been evaluated by several UN actors, independent organizations/experts, and some government departments, including a US government department. The evidence has consistently shown that the accusations were not accurate or true. When some aspects were found to require improvement, UNRWA took steps to align its work and systems with the recommendations that were provided.

Still, despite the evidence and the work that has been independently done, many of these accusations continue to be levelled against UNRWA, with considerable negative consequences for the organization and for Palestinian refugees. This fact sheet is meant to help inform people, including Canadian government officials, of the existing evidence and facts regarding these allegations. There is an ongoing need to share these facts with the public to ensure that only accurate information is disseminated and that UNRWA no longer faces backlash for accusations that have been demonstrated to be false.

This document has been compiled from work published by the United Nations, government departments from various countries, news agencies, and other non-governmental entities. The Group of 78, a Canadian civil society organization focused on international affairs and Canadian foreign policy, has co-produced this fact sheet. On several occasions the Group of 78 (G78) has expressed its support for the work of UNRWA and encouraged the Canadian government to continue and increase its support to the Agency. G78 is proud to do so again.

| The Claim  | The Facts  | The Evidence  |
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| <p>Around 10% of all UNRWA staff in Gaza have links to Hamas or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.</p> | <p>UNRWA has not received any evidence from Israel to support its claim, which is based on anecdotes and statements by Israeli commanders rather than neutral sources or tangible evidence.</p> <p>Israel is fully informed of the details of all UNRWA staff members, as the Agency shares names, employee numbers, and functions of all staff members every year with Israel as the occupying power in Palestine. Other UN Member States receive these lists upon request. Since 2011, UNRWA has not received any concerns regarding the submitted names.</p> <p>UNRWA’s leadership has prohibited all political activity on the part of staff as a precondition for employment with the Agency.</p> | <p><a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/no-evidence-israel-back-unrwa-accusations-says-eu-humanitarian-chief-2024-03-14/">https://www.reuters.com/world/no-evidence-israel-back-unrwa-accusations-says-eu-humanitarian-chief-2024-03-14/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/22/israel-unrwa-staff-terrorist-links-yet-to-provide-evidence-colonna-report">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/22/israel-unrwa-staff-terrorist-links-yet-to-provide-evidence-colonna-report</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.politico.eu/article/israel-unrwa-united-nations-palestine-gaza-hamas-humanitarian-aid/">https://www.politico.eu/article/israel-unrwa-united-nations-palestine-gaza-hamas-humanitarian-aid/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/unrwa-hamas-gaza-canada-1.7107785">https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/unrwa-hamas-gaza-canada-1.7107785</a></p> <p>Independent review of mechanisms and procedures to ensure adherence by UNRWA to the humanitarian principle of neutrality. April 2024 <a href="https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/unrwa_independent_review_on_neutrality.pdf">https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/unrwa_independent_review_on_neutrality.pdf</a></p> |
| <p>UNRWA is a haven for Hamas’ radical ideology.</p>   | <p>Out of the 250 submitted complaints, only 0.66% (less than 1%) of the 30,000 UNRWA employees were identified as being implicated in breach of neutrality from January 2022 to November 2024.</p> <p>From 2002 to 2025, the US State Department submitted annual reports to Congress on UNRWA’s adherence to neutrality, including checks of all UNRWA staff against the Consolidated United Nations Security Council Sanctions</p>  | <p>Independent Review of Mechanisms and Procedures to Ensure Adherence by UNRWA to the Humanitarian Principle of Neutrality, April 2024.</p> <p><a href="https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_independent_review_on_neutrality.pdf">https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_independent_review_on_neutrality.pdf</a></p> <p><a href="https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2024-">https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2024-</a></p>  |

| The Claim   | The Facts   | The Evidence  |
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|   | <p>List once every six months, and conducted visits to UNRWA facilities to examine UNRWA programs and policies.</p> <p>UNRWA includes a clause in all its contracts demanding that the contracting parties not engage in activities that are contrary to UNRWA's code of conduct and to practice impartiality. If the beneficiaries do not comply with these requirements, UNRWA terminates the contract immediately.</p>   | <p><a href="https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/USAID%20OIG%20Advisory%20on%20Gaza%20Oversight%207-25-2024.pdf">08/USAID%20OIG%20Advisory%20on%20Gaza%20Oversight%207-25-2024.pdf</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/22/world/middleeast/unrwa-israel-hamas-report.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/22/world/middleeast/unrwa-israel-hamas-report.html</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa-code-of-ethics-v4-2023-english_1.pdf">https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa-code-of-ethics-v4-2023-english_1.pdf</a></p>   |
| <p>Israel has documented deepening ties between UNRWA and Hamas since 2007.</p> | <p>Generally, the UN engages with all parties in areas under the control of <i>de facto</i> governments or armed groups to facilitate the delivery of services and humanitarian assistance. In Gaza, UNRWA's engagement with the <i>de facto</i> authorities takes place solely at an operational level with the exclusive purpose of delivering humanitarian aid and services and ensuring the safety of UNRWA staff.</p> <p>A US intelligence assessment of Israel's claims that UNRWA staff members participated in the Hamas attack on October 7 confirmed that this claim could not be independently verified. It also cast doubt on claims of wider links between UNRWA and Hamas and mentioned that, although UNRWA coordinates with Hamas on the operational level to deliver aid, there was no evidence to suggest that it partnered with the group.</p> | <p><a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/22/us-intelligence-unrwa-hamas">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/22/us-intelligence-unrwa-hamas</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.unrwa.org/unrwa-claims-versus-facts-2025">https://www.unrwa.org/unrwa-claims-versus-facts-2025</a></p> <p><a href="https://responsiblestatecraft.org/us-intel-unrwa-israel/">https://responsiblestatecraft.org/us-intel-unrwa-israel/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.npr.org/2024/04/28/1247702980/an-independent-review-finds-no-evidence-for-israels-claims-about-unrwa-and-hamas?utm_source=chatgpt.com">https://www.npr.org/2024/04/28/1247702980/an-independent-review-finds-no-evidence-for-israels-claims-about-unrwa-and-hamas?utm_source=chatgpt.com</a></p> |
| <p>Aid from UNRWA is diverted by Hamas.</p>                                     | <p>UNRWA has not received specific allegations of systemic aid diversion. If and when such incidents do arise, UNRWA has the responsibility to take immediate action, including</p>   | <p><a href="https://www.unrwa.org/unrwa-claims-versus-facts-2025">https://www.unrwa.org/unrwa-claims-versus-facts-2025</a></p> <p><a href="https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2024-">https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2024-</a></p>   |

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|   | <p>informing donors.</p> <p>UNRWA’s distribution of aid is implemented through a robust system of oversight and checks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As an implementer, UNRWA has full control of the supply chain from receiving the goods to bringing them to UNRWA warehouses and distribution points, where aid is delivered directly to registered beneficiaries.</li> <li>• UNRWA takes measures to ensure that it has no financial ties with individuals or organizations on the UN Security Council Consolidated Sanctions List. A report from the US State Department confirmed these findings.</li> </ul>  | <p><a href="https://www.usaid.gov/press-releases/2024/08/USAID%20OIG%20Advisory%20on%20Gaza%20Oversight%207-25-2024.pdf">08/USAID%20OIG%20Advisory%20on%20Gaza%20Oversight%207-25-2024.pdf</a></p>   |
| <p>Hamas stores weapons in UNRWA schools and tunnels under its buildings.</p> | <p>The Agency regularly assesses its facilities to ensure neutrality and that there is no misuse of its facilities. This is done through quarterly assessments by specialized teams. During the second and third quarters of 2023, UNRWA assessed 99% of its installations. The assessment of all Gaza installations was completed in September 2023.</p> <p>If a compromise of neutrality takes place, UNRWA protests to the <i>de facto</i> government and reports it to the Palestinian Authority and Israel. It also seals cavities and makes statements condemning the incident.</p> <p>Israel has long accused UNRWA of a lack of impartiality but has not been able to provide any solid and verifiable evidence in this regard. In 2004, Israel accused UNRWA of using its ambulances to transport rockets. This has never been proven. Israel was required to make a public apology</p> | <p><a href="https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021-2022-US-UNRWA-Framework-Signed.pdf">https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021-2022-US-UNRWA-Framework-Signed.pdf</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.unrwa.org/unrwa-claims-versus-facts-2025">https://www.unrwa.org/unrwa-claims-versus-facts-2025</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/unrwa-condemns-placement-rockets-second-time-one-its-schools">https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/unrwa-condemns-placement-rockets-second-time-one-its-schools</a></p> <p><a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3716930.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3716930.stm</a></p> <p><a href="https://forward.com/news/103040/american-jewish-leaders-ease-up-campaign-against-u/">https://forward.com/news/103040/american-jewish-leaders-ease-up-campaign-against-u/</a></p> |

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|   | for its unfounded accusation. It has since withdrawn these accusations.   |  |
| UNRWA schools use textbooks promoting hatred of Israel and glorifying terrorists.   | <p>UNRWA does not produce its own textbooks but uses those approved by host governments. Textbooks are reviewed for compliance with UN values and UNESCO standards. They are also enriched with modules on tolerance and conflict resolution.</p> <p>UNRWA’s stance on the curriculum closely aligns with the findings of a study commissioned by the European Commission in 2021.</p>  | <p><a href="https://www.gei.de/en/research/projects/report-on-palestinian-textbooks-paltex/faq-answers-to-frequently-asked-questions">https://www.gei.de/en/research/projects/report-on-palestinian-textbooks-paltex/faq-answers-to-frequently-asked-questions</a></p> <p><a href="https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/159281614191477048/pdf/The-Global-Cost-of-Inclusive-Refugee-Education.pdf">https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/159281614191477048/pdf/The-Global-Cost-of-Inclusive-Refugee-Education.pdf</a> (p.87)</p> |
| A 2019 U.S. Government Accountability Office report criticized UNRWA’s textbooks.   | A 2019 U.S. Government Accountability Office report reaffirmed UNRWA’s commitment to UN values. Where gaps were identified, corrective actions were implemented.  | <a href="https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-448">https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-448</a>  |
| On 7 October 2023, an UNRWA worker kidnapped a hostage into Gaza. UNRWA employees were involved in the 7 October 2023 attacks. To date, there has been no apology, no explanation, no condemnation by the UN. | The findings of the UN Office of Internal Oversight investigations regarding the alleged involvement of 19 UNRWA staff in the 7 October attacks were as follows: in one case, no evidence was obtained to support the allegations of kidnapping or any involvement in the October 7 attack, while in nine other cases, the evidence was insufficient to support claims of any involvement. In the other remaining nine cases, the evidence of kidnapping and overall involvement in the October 7 attacks was not conclusive. The UN and UNRWA nevertheless decided to terminate the employment of these nine people. | <p><a href="https://ieu-monitoring.com/editorial/unrwa-results-of-the-un-office-of-internal-oversight-services-oiios-investigation/440232?utm_source=ieu-portal">https://ieu-monitoring.com/editorial/unrwa-results-of-the-un-office-of-internal-oversight-services-oiios-investigation/440232?utm_source=ieu-portal</a></p> <p><a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/08/1152841">https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/08/1152841</a></p>  |

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| <p>Other UN agencies, including UNHCR, could replace UNRWA.</p> | <p>UNRWA has a cost-effective model and infrastructure that no other agency has. It has been built over many decades of work, and it serves local communities directly through its local staff.</p> <p>UNRWA and UNHCR have very distinct functions. UNRWA is a direct service provider. At the core of these services are education and healthcare. UNRWA provides public-like services. UNHCR does not have a mandate over Palestine Refugees. In addition, and unlike UNHCR, UNRWA does not have a mandate for refugee return or resettlement.</p> <p>As the occupying power, Israel will have to take the responsibility of providing services to the Palestinians currently served by UNRWA if the ban on UNRWA continues.</p> | <p><a href="https://www.amera.org/blog/statement-on-unrwa-funding-suspension/">https://www.amera.org/blog/statement-on-unrwa-funding-suspension/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/what-are-legal-questions-raised-by-israels-ban-un-palestinian-aid-agency-unrwa-2024-10-29/">https://www.reuters.com/world/what-are-legal-questions-raised-by-israels-ban-un-palestinian-aid-agency-unrwa-2024-10-29/</a></p> <p><a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/10/1156236">https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/10/1156236</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/un-signals-israel-replacing-unrwa-would-be-your-responsibility-2024-11-06/">https://www.reuters.com/world/un-signals-israel-replacing-unrwa-would-be-your-responsibility-2024-11-06/</a></p> |