

When the West Collectively Punishes Gaza by Suspending Funding to UNRWA

Sunday 4 February 2024, by [HASS Amira](#) (Date first published: 4 February 2024).

Suspensions that 12 UNRWA employees participated in the October 7 massacres resulted in 15 Western countries punishing all the residents of the Gaza Strip - currently the world's most severe humanitarian disaster zone.

Palestinians demonstrate in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, calling for continued international support to UNRWA, on Tuesday. Credit: AFP

Based on evidence provided by Israel backing up [these suspicions](#), the United States, followed by Japan and European countries, were quick to announce their suspension of contributions to UNRWA.

The UN agency provides services to nearly 6 million Palestinian refugees in three countries and the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, including East Jerusalem.

UNRWA has been in [Israel's crosshairs](#) for many years, so of course it cheered the moves - as if the disappearance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees would erase the Palestinians' link to their lost homeland and leave it forgotten.

Now, as of next month, about 30,000 [UNRWA employees](#) will not be receiving their salaries, and the educational and health-care services the agency provides to hundreds of thousands of people will be severely harmed.

In the absence of these critical funds, UNRWA staff members in the bombarded and bleeding enclave that is Gaza today, will gradually stop providing their emergency services.

People in a line for clean water in Gaza City. Credit: Mohammed Abed/AFP

They will no longer be able to carry out the most vital operations that they have taken upon themselves - while risking their own safety - in order to somewhat alleviate [people's misery](#) today: to transport fuel to hospitals and to those portions of Gaza's water and sewage system that haven't yet been destroyed in the war, so that supply of drinkable water will not be totally gone, and the sewage will not flood more streets; to look after the most basic hygiene conditions at UNRWA schools overcrowded with hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Gazans; treat the sick at clinics - including those who have contracted infections from overcrowding and polluted water, and provide basic food packages and bottles of water to distribution stations for hundreds of thousands of hungry and thirsty people.

No aid organization has the capability to replace UNRWA in just a few weeks, which has years of experience looking after Gaza's refugee population.

In response to the [allegations](#), the UN agency dismissed nine of its staff, while one employee was reportedly killed and two are missing. Furthermore, two investigative committees have been appointed – one will present its findings to UNRWA and the second to UN headquarters in New York. But these steps haven't satisfied the countries of the enlightened world.

Their decision to opt for collective punishment will worsen the hunger, malnutrition, thirst, and disease ravaging the Gaza Strip. These states' quick announcement shows contempt for last month's [interim order](#) by the International Court of Justice in The Hague after it had ordered Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent genocide, which include ensuring the entry of humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip – something in which UNRWA plays a central role.

Food distribution in Rafah Credit: Hatem Ali / AP

Fifteen countries, headed by the U.S. and Germany, are signaling that they view the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip less seriously than the [suspicions raised](#) by the [evidence](#) regarding 12 of the agency's employees, and that reducing or halting this mass disaster is less urgent than pleasing their ally, Israel.

And it's an ally that for decades has been pursuing a policy of settlements and the forced [displacement](#) of Palestinians, which on paper these other countries are also opposed to. They are well aware of reports of Israeli soldiers and civilians who have killed unarmed Palestinians, and of the fact that in most cases, the perpetrators aren't being punished. Senior cabinet ministers of their Israeli ally have been openly advocating the crime of [expelling](#) the Palestinians from Gaza.

Therefore, the contrast with the 15 countries' limp [condemnation](#) of all this – if they have done so at all – only intensifies the disgrace of their decision to assist Israel in its campaign of revenge and destruction against all of Gaza's residents.

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P.S.

• Haaretz. Feb 4, 2024 4:21 am IST:
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