

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 31, 2024

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell,

We write to express our outrage over recent reports that staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) participated in Hamas' barbaric attacks against Israel on October 7, 2023, which claimed the lives of 1,200 Israelis and resulted in the hostage-taking of over 240 people, including young children.¹

On January 26, 2024, Israeli intelligence officials reported that they had credible, corroborated evidence that UNRWA staff members participated in the attacks of October 7. This evidence was reportedly obtained through interrogations of militants that were arrested during the attack.² In response, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini announced that he terminated the contracts of the alleged staff members, launched an investigation, and plans to hold those individuals responsible.³ We believe that Lazzarini would not take these steps if he did not believe in the credibility of Israel's accusations.

While revelations that humanitarian workers from UNRWA engaged in acts of terrorism are jarring; sadly, they are not shocking. For years, we have seen documented evidence of the corruption, antisemitism, and support for terrorism that exists inside this organization.⁴ As we learned last week, UNRWA not only employs Hamas members, but rather Hamas fighters whose actions on October 7 resulted in the rape, kidnapping, torture and murder of innocent civilians.

In 2018, the Trump Administration correctly decided to halt U.S. contributions to UNRWA, labeling the organization an "irredeemably flawed operation."⁵ However, the Biden Administration foolishly reversed the decision. Despite numerous attempts from lawmakers to

¹ Vivian Salama et al. "U.S. Halts Funding for U.N. Agency Amid Claims Staff Took Part in Oct. 7 Attacks," *Wall Street Journal*, January 26, 2024. <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/u-s-halts-funding-for-u-n-agency-amid-claims-staff-took-part-in-oct-7-attacks-3247918b>

² Barak Ravid. "Canada, U.K., Australia, others join U.S. in pausing funding to UNRWA," *Axios*, updated January 27, 2024. <https://www.axios.com/2024/01/26/unrwa-gaza-hamas-israel-attack>

³ Philippe Lazzarini. "Serious Allegations Against UNRWA Staff in the Gaza Strip," *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*, January 26, 2024. <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/serious-allegations-against-unrwa-staff-gaza-strip>

⁴ "UN Teachers Call to Murder Jews, Reveals New Report," *UN Watch*, March 14, 2023. <https://unwatch.org/un-teachers-call-to-murder-jews-reveals-new-report/>; Ilan Ben Zion. "Rockets found in UNRWA school, for third time," *Times of Israel*, July 30, 2014. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/rockets-found-in-unrwa-school-for-third-time/>;

"Released hostage says he was held by UNRWA teacher in Gaza – report," *The Jerusalem Post*, updated December 2, 2023. <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-775777>; "Gazans to IDF: Hamas steals UNRWA food, kills civilians who ask for aid," *The Jerusalem Post*, updated January 9, 2024. <https://www.jpost.com/israel-hamas-war/article-781286>

⁵ "US ends funding of UN agency for Palestinian refugees," *CNBC*, August 31, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/31/us-ends-funding-of-un-agency-for-palestinian-refugees.html>

suspend contributions, the U.S. has provided more than \$730 million to UNRWA since 2021,⁶ making the U.S. taxpayer its largest individual donor.

The State Department announced that it has “temporarily paused additional funding for UNRWA” while it reviews “allegations and the steps the United Nations is taking to address them.”⁷ We disagree with White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby’s comments on the matter. He said, “It certainly looks as if there’s cause to be concerned about the actions of some of the members of UNRWA . . . but that does not and nor should it impugn the entire agency and the entire body of work that they’re doing.”⁸ We believe, to the contrary, that this does impugn the entire agency.

Let us be crystal clear: last week’s revelation that UNRWA staff members played a part in the October 7 attacks is not an example of a few bad apples acting out of turn. Instead, it is emblematic of an organization where no investigation or subsequent corrective measures will ever be enough to cure the rot that is so clearly endemic to its mission.

The United States must permanently stop all contributions to UNRWA. Senate Republicans have introduced several bills this Congress to do just that, including the UNRWA Accountability and Transparency Act. As we consider ways to provide necessary assistance to Israel in its fight against Hamas terrorists, we request that any supplemental package include an immediate and permanent prohibition against U.S. contributions to UNRWA.

Sincerely,



Pete Ricketts
United States Senator



Tim Scott
United States Senator



James E. Risch
United States Senator

⁶ Josh Christenson et al. “Biden admin sent \$730M to UN group despite calls for anti-Jew violence: ‘rotten to the core’,” *New York Post*, October 10, 2023. <https://nypost.com/2023/10/10/biden-admin-funneled-730-million-to-un-group-despite-its-personnel-calling-for-violence-against-jews/>

⁷ Matthew Miller. “Statement on UNRWA Allegations,” *U.S. State Department*, January 26, 2024. <https://www.state.gov/statement-on-unrwa-allegations/>

⁸ Greg Norman. “Kirby unsure of ‘dollar figure’ of US funding to controversial UN agency allegedly tied to Hamas attack,” *Fox News*, January 26, 2024. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/kirby-unsure-dollar-figure-us-funding-controversial-un-agency-allegedly-tied-hamas-attack>

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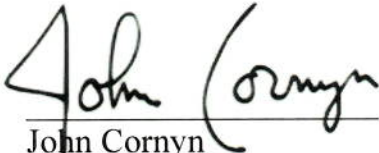
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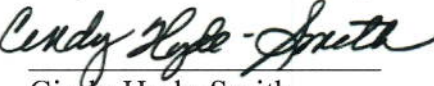
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