

THE GAZA STRIP: HUMANITARIAN CRISIS DEEPENS AT A TIME FUNDING SUSPENSIONS PUT UNRWA AID OPERATIONS IN PERIL

Friday 2 February 2024, by [UNRWA](#) (Date first published: 1 February 2024).

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Tens of thousands of people have been forced to flee to the south due to bombardment and fighting in Khan Younis over the last week, adding to more than 1.4 million people already crammed in the southern governorate of Rafah. Most are living in makeshift structures, tents, or out in the open, and now also fear they might no longer receive any food or other humanitarian assistance from UNRWA.

“Rafah has become a sea of people fleeing bombardments,” said Thomas White, Director of UNRWA Affairs in Gaza and UN Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory.

Most of those fleeing Khan Younis have already been displaced several times, and many are forced to leave the largest UNRWA shelter in the Khan Younis Training Centre. UNRWA staff, themselves forced to flee their homes, continue to deliver food and tents to those newly displaced around them.

Across the Gaza Strip, nearly 2 million people -the vast majority women and children- depend on UNRWA for their sheer survival as the Agency manages overcrowded shelters, food assistance and primary health care. Their humanitarian conditions are getting worse as the war continues and humanitarian access remains largely restricted.

In the north where famine is looming, UNRWA has had very little access since the war began. According to White: “UNRWA received reports that people in the area are grinding bird feed to make flour. We continue to coordinate with the Israeli Army to be able to go to the north, but this has been largely denied,” he said. “When our convoys are finally permitted to go to the area, people rush to the trucks to get food and often eat it on the spot”, he added.

UNRWA is the largest humanitarian organization in Gaza. Of its 13,000 staff, more than 3,000 continue working, they are the backbone of the humanitarian aid operations.

“It’s difficult to imagine that Gazans will survive this crisis without UNRWA,” White said.

When presented with serious allegations by Israeli authorities that some UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October abhorrent attacks on Israel, UNRWA Commissioner-General took the decision to immediately terminate the appointment of these staff in the interest of the Agency and seized the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services in New York, which launched an investigation. Full accountability and transparency are expected out of this process, should the allegations be substantiated. Shortly after the UNRWA announcement, a number of donor countries suspended US\$ 440 million worth of funding to the Agency.

“As the war in Gaza is being pursued unabated, and at the time the International Court of Justice calls for more humanitarian assistance, it is the time to reinforce and not to weaken UNRWA. The Agency remains the largest aid organization in one of the most severe and complex humanitarian crises in the world,” said UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini. “I echo the call of the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to resume funding to UNRWA. If the funding remains suspended, we will most likely be forced to shut down our operations by end of February not only in Gaza but also across the region.”

UNRWA provides assistance to Palestine Refugees in the Gaza Strip, West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

01 February 2024

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Background Information:

UNRWA is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The United Nations General Assembly established UNRWA in 1949 with a mandate to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to registered Palestine refugees in the Agency’s area of operations pending a just and lasting solution to their plight.

UNRWA operates in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, The Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Tens of thousands of Palestine refugees who lost their homes and livelihoods due to the 1948 conflict continue to be displaced and in need of support, nearly 75 years on.

UNRWA helps Palestine Refugees achieve their full potential in human development through quality services it provides in education, health care, relief and social services, protection, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance, and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.

P.S.

- UNRWA. 01 February 2024:
<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/news-releases/gaza-strip-humanitarian-crisis-deepens-time-funding-suspensions-put-unrwa-aid>