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

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⁵ "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/
⁶ "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-775772
sustain contributions, the U.S. has provided more than $730 million to UNRWA since 2021, 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.” 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.” 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

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Kevin Cramer  
United States Senator

Mitt Romney  
United States Senator

Mike Braun  
United States Senator

Deb Fischer  
United States Senator

John Cornyn  
United States Senator

Katie Boyd Britt  
United States Senator

Eric S. Schmitt  
United States Senator

John Kennedy  
United States Senator

Ron Johnson  
United States Senator

Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator
Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator

Tom Cotton
United States Senator