

OPEN LETTER ON THE FUTURE OF UNRWA

To Australian Parliamentarians,

We, the below signatories, seek urgent leadership from this Australian Parliament to ensure the future and security of the United Nations Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Australia has a proud history of supporting this agency financially, and Australians have often held senior positions across UNRWA, reflecting our country's long history with the organisation. But right now, it requires global champions to ensure its continued existence.

Recently, the Israeli Knesset passed legislation to ban UNRWA in under three months.

Humanitarian agencies are interconnected through this system, which is the only agency with the capacity to ensure assistance to the entire Gaza strip. The entire humanitarian response in Gaza relies on its continued functioning. Disrupting its operations undermines not only humanitarian goals but also the prospects for a just and sustainable peace in the region.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said Israel's ban on UNRWA, if implemented, would violate international law, the founding U.N. Charter and a 1946 U.N. convention on the diplomatic privileges and immunities granted to U.N. operations.

The United Nations Security Council has urged Israel "to abide by its international obligations, respect the privileges and immunities of UNRWA and live up to its responsibility to allow and facilitate full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian assistance in all its forms into and throughout the entire Gaza Strip."

As stated by Australia's Foreign Minister, "UNRWA has taken steps to address allegations regarding individual employees' support for terrorist organizations and demonstrated its willingness to pursue and implement reform of internal processes in line with the independent review of April 2024, led by Ms. Catherine Colonna, on UNRWA neutrality." Reform of UNRWA is possible and supported by the organisation, but its survival at this time is too urgent to fail. There is simply no other organisation with the scale and capacity to provide this assistance.

We therefore call on the Foreign Minister, Senator the Hon. Penny Wong to work within the United Nations to support all work towards UNRWA's continued functioning as called for by Philippe Lazzarini in a letter to the President of the General Assembly, Mr Philémon Yang: "I seek Member States' support, commensurate with the gravity of the situation and risks, to ensure the Agency's ability to fully implement the mandate conferred by the General Assembly, [Res. 302 (IV), 1949]."

Additionally, we call on the Foreign Minister to use all possible private and public channels to be a champion of UNRWA and amplify the urgent need for its continued existence.

Finally, we call on all parliamentarians to work together to ensure that Australian funding to UNRWA is maintained.

We hope to see unity across the Australian Parliament given what is at stake for the Palestinian people, and humanity more broadly.

There is simply no alternative.

Signed,



AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL
FOR
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT



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Children



REPRODUCTIVE
CHOICES



The Fred Hollows
Foundation

