

US Cuts Half Its Aid for Palestinian Refugees

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Economic conditions in Occupied Palestine already “scream.” The Trump administration, in cahoots with Israel, just made things tougher by cutting half of US aid to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA).

It goes for healthcare, education and other social services – vital for around five million Palestinian refugees and their descendants in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan – victims of Israeli aggression in 1948 and 1967.

UNWRA defines a Palestinian refugee as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict” – along with others affected the same way during Israel’s Six Day War of aggression.

For starters, the Trump administration is withholding \$65 million of a \$125 million payment to UNWRA due this month – maybe all aid to be frozen or ended later, an act of collective punishment, a US and Israeli specialty, flagrantly violating international law.

On January 2, Trump disgracefully tweeted:

“(W)e pay the Palestinians HUNDRED OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS a year and get no appreciation or respect.”

“They don’t even want to negotiate a long overdue peace treaty with Israel...(W)ith the Palestinians no longer willing to talk peace, why should we make any of these massive future payments to them?”

Washington and Israel want unconditional Palestinian surrender, subjugation under Tel Aviv’s repressive boot, not peace both countries abhor.

An unnamed US official said

“(t)here is a need to undertake a fundamental reexamination of UNRWA, both in the way it operates and the way it is funded.”

The PA responded to Trump’s move, accusing Washington of “complicity with the Israeli occupation by attempting to remove another permanent status issue off the table.”

US administrations have always been complicit with the Jewish state since its 1948 creation, disdainful of Palestinian rights and welfare.

PLO executive committee member Hanan Ashrawi blasted the Trump administration’s aid freeze, saying

it’s “following Netanyahu’s instructions to gradually dismantle the one agency that was established by the international community to protect the rights of the Palestinian refugees and provide them with essential services.”

“It is also creating conditions that will generate further instability throughout the region and will demonstrate that it has no compunction in targeting the innocent. Once again the US Administration proves its complicity with the Israeli occupation.”

Netanyahu wants UNWRA eliminated, discussed in a previous article.

Aid cuts will grievously harm “the most vulnerable segment of the Palestinian people, (depriving them) of the right to education, health, shelter and a dignified life,” Ashwari explained.

Washington provides over \$350 million annually to UNWRA, about one-third of its budget. Neocon Nikki Haley called for a total freeze unless Palestinians bow to the will of Washington and Israel.

Cutting aid to UNWRA inflicts enormous harm on long-suffering Palestinian refugees, deepening a humanitarian crisis in Gazan and other refugee camps.

UNWRA head Pierre Krahenbuhl said cutting aid by Washington threatens “the dignity and human security of millions” of Palestinians, along with threatening regional security.

He called for a global fundraising effort to make up the shortfall caused by Washington’s despicable action, adding:

“At stake is the access of 525,000 boys and girls in 700 UNRWA schools, and their future.”

“At stake is the dignity and human security of millions of Palestine refugees, in need of emergency food assistance and other support in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.”

“At stake is the access of refugees to primary health care, including pre-natal care and other life-saving services. At stake are the rights and dignity of an entire community.”

Israel's Ziofascist UN envoy Danny Danon praised Washington's move, disgracefully saying

"(i)t's time for this absurdity to end..."

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a weak-kneed statement, saying

"I am very concerned, and I strongly hope that in the end it will be possible for the United States to maintain the funding of UNRWA in which the US has a very important share" - instead of blasting Washington's despicable move.

A State Department letter explaining it said additional US funding depends on major UNWRA changes demanded by Washington and Israel.

Both countries are using long-suffering Palestinian refugees as pawns to get PA officials to bow to their will - pressuring them to sacrifice the rights and welfare of their most vulnerable people.

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