

Strategic Foundations to Protect UNRWA and Counter the Israeli Plan to Dismantle It

By Mr. Ahmed Hamash

Researcher at Badil Center
– The Palestinian Resource Center for Residency and Refugee Rights



Introduction

Since its founding in 1949, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) has repeatedly faced efforts to dismantle or alter its mandate and reduce its services. However, these attempts intensified and became a persistent Israeli campaign after the launch of the Oslo peace process. This campaign has gradually escalated: beginning with cuts to the quality and quantity of UNRWA's services, followed by proposals and understandings between Palestinian and Israeli figures, and eventually expanding into bilateral agreements between donor countries and UNRWA. The strategy reached a new level with Jared Kushner's calls to defund the agency, end its role, and transfer its responsibilities to host countries and other international or local institutions (Foreign Policy, 2018).

The campaign against UNRWA reached its peak during Israel's war of extermination against the Palestinian people in late 2023, prompting some of Israel's allies to suspend their support for the agency (UNRWA, 2024a). Meanwhile, Israel moved to restrict UNRWA's operations and sought to label it as a terrorist organization (Doctors Without Borders, 2024). These attacks form part of Israel's broader strategy to erase the Palestinian refugee issue, remove the right of return from the international agenda, and evade political and legal responsibility for the 1948 Nakba and the ongoing suffering of over 9.3 million Palestinian refugees and displaced persons (Badil, 2022, p. 38).

This article explores the strategies available to Palestinians—both at official and civil levels—to safeguard UNRWA. As an international body, UNRWA's presence underscores the United Nations' responsibility for addressing the Palestinian refugee issue and the crimes of the Nakba. It remains a vital institution until Palestinian refugees can exercise their rights to return, reclaim their property, and receive compensation for the harm they have endured.

This article seeks to address the central question: **What means and mechanisms are available to the Palestinians to defend UNRWA against the ongoing Israeli assault?** While this discussion takes place amidst a financial and political crisis threatening the very existence of UNRWA, it does not examine this crisis in isolation. Instead, it situates the current challenges within the broader historical



and political context that has led to a decline in UNRWA's services, a widening gap in international protection for Palestinian refugees, and the existential threat to the agency itself.

The importance of this strategic plan is rooted in several key factors. First, it offers a Palestinian vision for safeguarding UNRWA, not only against Israeli attacks but also by addressing the structural flaws within the institution itself. Second, as Israel continues to displace Palestinians and deny them their rights to return, reclaim property, and receive compensation, the dependency of refugees and displaced persons on UNRWA's services grows even more acute. Third, Israel has recently succeeded in rallying certain influential countries to suspend funding for UNRWA, further widening the protection gap and turning humanitarian aid into a tool for advancing political agendas at the expense of humanitarian needs in Palestine.

Thus, developing a strategy to shield UNRWA from Israeli efforts requires a thorough reassessment of the ongoing political and financial crises plaguing the agency. This article will explore several key issues, including an overview of the protection system for Palestinian refugees and the flaws within that system, which have exacerbated their suffering. It will also examine the drivers behind Israel's campaign to dismantle UNRWA and erase the Palestinian refugee issue, with a particular focus on recent Israeli actions in Gaza and Jerusalem. Finally, the article outlines the ways and mechanisms available to Palestinians and the international community to resist this campaign and safeguard UNRWA until refugees and displaced persons can fully exercise their rights.

International Protection for Palestinian Refugees:

An Overview

The return of refugees and displaced persons to their original homes and the restoration of their property is the ideal solution to their plight, particularly in cases of mass displacement like that of Palestinian refugees (UNHCR, n.d.). Until such a return is possible, they must be guaranteed international protection. The International Committee of the Red Cross defines this protection as encompassing all activities aimed at ensuring the full respect of individual rights, in accordance with the relevant body of law—namely, human rights law, international



humanitarian law, and refugee law (Von Flüe & De Maio, 1990).

This protection includes not only legal and physical safeguards but also humanitarian assistance designed to preserve lives, ease suffering, and ensure the dignity and rights of refugees until a permanent solution can be found (UNHCR, 2006, p. 12). In the case of Palestinian refugees displaced by the Partition Resolution (181) of 1947 and the Nakba of 1948, the United Nations established a unique protection system. This system includes the United Nations Conciliation Commission (UNCCP), responsible for providing legal protection and seeking a permanent resolution, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), tasked with delivering humanitarian aid (Badil, 2009). The UNHCR, which holds the general mandate to protect refugees, was designated as a backup to protect Palestinian refugees if either the Conciliation Commission or UNRWA ceased providing protection (ibid.).

Although this system of special protection represents an international acknowledgment of the uniqueness of the Palestinian refugee issue, it has been largely ineffective. The Conciliation Commission ceased its operations in the early 1950s, and UNRWA's mandate remains limited, hindered by structural and organizational challenges. Additionally, the manipulation of Article 1/D of the Refugee Convention by various states has complicated efforts, preventing the UNHCR from stepping in to fill the gaps in protection (ibid.).

UNRWA's mandate is limited to providing humanitarian services to registered refugees within its five areas of operation—namely, the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon—along with some advocacy work. This leaves refugees without essential legal or physical protection, as UNRWA is not empowered to pursue a durable and just solution for Palestinian refugees under UN General Assembly Resolution 194. Its mandate does not extend to intervening with host countries to ensure the protection of refugee rights. Furthermore, UNRWA's operational definition of a refugee excludes many Palestinian refugees and displaced persons. It defines a refugee based on the need for humanitarian assistance, rather than the fact of forced displacement. This limited geographical scope also means that assistance is not guaranteed to those living outside its areas of operation (UNRWA, n.d.).

Compounding these challenges is UNRWA's persistent financial crisis, which is deeply political in nature. At the heart of this crisis is a structural flaw in the agency's funding mechanism. UNRWA's budget for basic services relies almost entirely—up to 96%—on voluntary contributions from donor countries (UNRWA, 2016). Contributions from the United Nations' general budget, amounting to only about 4%, are negligible, making the agency vulnerable to political pressures that hinder its ability to meet its objectives. The crisis is further aggravated by the growing number of Palestinian refugees, their escalating needs, and Israel's continued displacement of Palestinians while denying their right to return. This places increasing strain on UNRWA's services and programs.

These issues have severely impacted Palestinian refugee communities in various host countries. The absence of legal and physical protection has left them particularly vulnerable to the conflicts in these countries, especially in light of the failure of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to assume its responsibilities toward Palestinian refugees (Badil, 2009). On the other hand, UNRWA's recurring financial crisis has led to a reduction in services and the cancellation of entire programs, forcing Palestinian refugees to bear the burden of the international community's shortcomings on their own.

UNRWA's limited and fragmented mandate leaves it ill-equipped to address the Palestinian refugee crisis, now spanning more than seven decades, and their growing needs. This vulnerability has made it a target for Israeli efforts, supported by its allies, to dismantle the agency's services and transfer its responsibilities to host countries or other institutions not sanctioned by the UN General Assembly. To counter this assault, any strategy must include a reform of UNRWA's mandate and funding structure. What sufficed after the 1948 Nakba, when 950,000 refugees and displaced persons needed aid, is no longer adequate. The framework that was designed for a temporary situation now falls short of meeting the enduring needs of millions of Palestinians after more than seven decades.

***The Israeli Campaign to Dismantle UNRWA
and Erase the Palestinian Refugee Issue***

Israel's ongoing campaign, supported by the United States, to dismantle UNRWA and eliminate the Palestinian refugee issue is not new. This effort has accompanied

UNRWA throughout its history at various levels. Central to this campaign is Israel's denial of the right of return for Palestinian refugees and displaced persons, coupled with its attempts to remove this right from the international agenda. For over seven decades, Israel has intensified its assault on UNRWA, employing a range of tactics. Initially, it criticized the agency, claiming it perpetuated the refugee issue rather than resolving it. Later, Israel accused UNRWA of inciting against the state, employing Palestinian resistance fighters, and even went so far as to target its headquarters and staff. In 2024, Israel, with the support of its allies, succeeded in pressuring several nations to suspend their financial support for the agency.

This campaign is a cornerstone of Israel's broader colonial and apartheid system. By demonizing and delegitimizing UNRWA, Israel has manufactured a financial and political crisis that threatens the agency's very existence. Israel's ultimate goal is to either dismantle UNRWA entirely or render it powerless, though it recognizes the difficulty of achieving this through a UN General Assembly resolution as long as no final solution to the refugee issue has been reached. To this end, Israel has deployed two main strategies to undermine UNRWA's credibility and weaken its foundation (Badil, 2018a):

First: Financial Strangulation – Reducing Contributions to UNRWA's Budget and Restricting Its Spending

Israel, in collaboration with its allies, capitalized on the structural weaknesses in UNRWA's funding system to impose a financial blockade, aimed at depleting the agency's budget, crippling its operations, and ultimately dismantling its role. This strategy enabled complicit nations to exert pressure on UNRWA, reshaping and restricting its activities to serve Israel's colonial objectives. Political and financial pressure, particularly from Israel's key allies—the European Union and the United States—was a crucial tool in slashing UNRWA's core budget, leading to the cancellation of vital programs and services. In their place, only a few emergency-focused programs were funded. Furthermore, politically conditional contributions increased, imposing restrictions on how UNRWA allocated its resources. Donor nations, aligned with Israel, tied their donations to specific

conditions that undermined the core of the Palestinian refugee issue and served Israeli interests, far removed from the principles of humanitarian aid.

In 2018, as the financial crisis deepened, the UNRWA Advisory Commission convened an emergency meeting of donor countries after the U.S. administration halved its contribution (United Nations, 2018). Rather than addressing the root causes of the crisis, several donor nations exerted political pressure, demanding administrative and service cuts that severely impacted UNRWA's core functions, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and healthcare (Badil, 2018a). That same year, in response to these pressures, UNRWA made the decision to lay off 1,000 employees in Gaza (The Palestinian Information Center), a move reflecting the agency's broader policy of cuts since the Israeli campaign against it intensified in the 1990s.

The conditions imposed by donor nations extended beyond budget cuts and program cancellations. They also demanded changes to the Palestinian curriculum and the implementation of security measures for both UNRWA staff and those who benefited from its services. By the end of 2019, the European Union imposed political conditions on civil society organizations, including UNRWA (Palestinian National Campaign to Reject Conditional Funding, 2019). Similarly, the United States enforced security measures on UNRWA under the terms of the 2021-2022 Cooperation Framework Agreement, requiring screening and auditing based on U.S. anti-terrorism regulations. Section 301(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, which underpins U.S. contributions to UNRWA's budget, stipulates that «no funds from the United States may be provided to UNRWA unless the agency takes all reasonable steps to ensure that no part of the U.S. contribution is used to aid any refugee who has received military training as a member of the so-called Palestine Liberation Army or any other guerrilla organization, or who has participated in or is currently involved in any terrorist activities» (U.S. Department of State, 2023, pp. 2–3).

These conditions not only label Palestinian factions and resistance groups as terrorists but also transform UNRWA's mission from a humanitarian agency into a security apparatus. Under these terms, UNRWA must vet all recipients of its services, excluding anyone associated with resistance movements classified as terrorist. The memorandum of understanding further obliges UNRWA to monitor

its employees' social media activity, track any statements they publish, and submit periodic reports to the United States and other relevant countries on individuals deemed ineligible for assistance—those accused of terrorism. Moreover, UNRWA is expected to collaborate with host countries, including Israel, to share information on such individuals.

These political conditions extend to altering the Palestinian educational curriculum in UNRWA schools (Badil, 2020), seeking to erase the identity and rights of the Palestinian people and detach the curriculum from its political context. As part of this, UNRWA issued an educational guide instructing teachers to avoid any material that emphasizes the Palestinians' inalienable rights, such as the right of return and self-determination (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

Imposing these conditions not only violates UNRWA's mandate to provide services based on humanitarian need, irrespective of political affiliations, but it also attempts to reshape Palestinian consciousness. This new awareness would be one that accepts the colonial system and relinquishes resistance in exchange for minimal rights. Modifying the curriculum to align with Israeli interests and stripping certain individuals of their refugee status plays directly into Israel's goals: creating the «good Palestinian» who complies, while undermining the right of return by denying refugee status to the descendants of displaced persons.

Second: Replacing UNRWA by shifting its responsibilities to other entities or burdening Arab nations

In addition to the financial blockade, Israel has actively sought to portray UNRWA as incompetent and incapable of fulfilling its mandate. By delegitimizing and demonizing the agency—accusing it of colluding with Hamas and other so-called «terrorist» factions (UNRWA, 2024b)—Israel encourages the transfer of its responsibilities to other international institutions deemed «more capable» or calls for host countries to take over UNRWA's role. Israel seizes upon the dissatisfaction of Palestinian refugees with UNRWA's declining services to underscore its purported failure, while conveniently ignoring the political forces that have caused the deterioration of these services (Badil, 2018b).

While the transfer of UNRWA's responsibilities to other agencies might appear as



a technical adjustment to streamline humanitarian aid and ease financial burdens, Israel’s true goal is far more calculated. By dissolving UNRWA’s unique status, Israel hopes to remove the international legal responsibility for Palestinian refugees and reduce their plight to a mere humanitarian issue. It has made notable progress in shifting these burdens to host and Arab nations by pressuring them to increase their financial contributions to UNRWA. Although Arab countries initially resisted, arguing that the international community bears responsibility for Palestinian suffering, they have since increased their donations in response to UNRWA’s urgent calls for aid (Badil, 2018b).

These efforts to sideline UNRWA are not new. During the 2022 Gaza war, and amid growing financial and political pressures, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini suggested that partnerships within the broader UN system might help sustain services: “One option currently being explored is to maximize partnerships within the wider UN system... such partnerships have the potential to protect essential services and your rights from chronic underfunding” (UNRWA, 2022).

The 2024 report by the United Nations Review Committee on UNRWA Neutrality (United Nations, 2024), following accusations against 12 UNRWA employees for participating in the October 7 operations, proposed a new concept of partnership. This proposal involves distributing UNRWA’s tasks to other international bodies, none of which have an explicit mandate from the UN General Assembly, thereby laying the groundwork for UNRWA’s eventual replacement.



While such partnerships are presented as a solution to UNRWA’s financial crisis, they fail to address the root causes of the agency’s funding problems or the broader Israeli campaign aimed at dismantling it.

Transferring any of UNRWA’s responsibilities or inviting other agencies to participate significantly in its work effectively alters its mandate—a power reserved solely for the United Nations General Assembly. Expanding partnerships with international agencies does not resolve UNRWA’s persistent crisis; instead, it signals a retreat from its core duties and serves the political agendas of those seeking to dismantle UNRWA and reframe the refugee issue. This transfer of responsibilities paves the way for eliminating the political and legal aspects of the



Palestinian refugee situation.

UNRWA's significance lies in its unique UN mandate to serve Palestinian refugees, a mandate that carries political weight by safeguarding their fundamental rights, especially in the absence or obstruction of the International Conciliation Commission. While other international bodies may offer higher levels of education, healthcare, or relief services, none possess a specialized mandate like UNRWA's. This distinction ensures that the international community remains obligated to provide these services until the implementation of UN Resolution 194 (1948).

UNRWA's role extends beyond humanitarian aid. Its existence underlines the international community's political responsibility to address the Palestinian refugee issue in accordance with international law. Israel's attempts to halt UNRWA's funding and transfer its duties to other agencies are not limited to financial strategies. Israel has also used the Gaza conflict as an opportunity to target UNRWA, accusing it of bias and claiming it facilitates Hamas operations. These accusations, however, are not new; Israel has leveled similar claims against UNRWA in other regions of resistance, including Lebanon during the 1970s and 1980s (Sayigh, 1979) and again during the Second Intifada.

From the end of the Second Intifada to the current war on Gaza, Israeli accusations against UNRWA have intensified, particularly in Gaza, where it is alleged that Palestinian organizations use its facilities. These accusations raise critical questions about Israel's broader intent to dismantle UNRWA, especially in regions facing Israeli aggression. Beyond its aim of abolishing the right of return, Israel seeks to eliminate any international witness to its wars of extermination against the Palestinian people or replace UNRWA with other organizations focused solely on short-term humanitarian crises, whose mandates end once the conflict subsides.

Israel's global campaign against UNRWA, which led to the suspension of its funding, created a dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Under this pretext, Israel has deprived Palestinians of life-sustaining necessities, such as humanitarian aid and basic healthcare, resulting in famine and the outbreak of disease in a calculated, systematic manner (UNRWA, 2024). Simultaneously, Israel escalated its direct targeting of UNRWA, moving from calls to dismantle the agency to attacking its facilities, staff, and operations. This onslaught obstructed UNRWA's

ability to provide even the most basic services. The toll has been devastating: 209 UNRWA employees have been martyred, 190 facilities damaged, and 17 of 27 health centers shut down. UNRWA reports that there have been 464 attacks on its facilities, resulting in the deaths of 563 Palestinians and injuries to 1,790 internally displaced persons sheltering in UNRWA facilities (UNRWA, 2024c). In parallel, Israel, in collusion with Western allies, has intensified efforts to shift UNRWA's responsibilities to other international bodies, such as the World Food Program and USAID, or through direct aid deliveries by individual nations via airlifts and the construction of maritime routes along Gaza's coast. This diversion of aid bypasses UNRWA, avoiding pressure on Israel to reopen land crossings and allow the agency to fulfill its mission. The ultimate objective is to cripple UNRWA's capacity, ensuring it no longer plays a role, as stated by Israeli officials, in the "day after" the Gaza war.

Though much attention is focused on Israel's policies toward UNRWA in Gaza, Israel is also pursuing the closure of UNRWA offices in Jerusalem and the West Bank—a campaign that began with Trump's «Deal of the Century» and his 2018 decision to cut US funding to the agency. That same year, Jerusalem's mayor proposed a bill to replace UNRWA services with municipal ones, a move that would not only eliminate the agency's presence in Jerusalem but also strip Palestinian refugees there of their status (UNRWA, 2018).

Amid the ongoing war on Gaza, Israeli forces have entered UNRWA facilities in the West Bank and Jerusalem during military operations in the camps, restricting the movement of agency staff through arbitrary measures. To further intimidate UNRWA and its employees, certain Israeli political parties have encouraged Zionist settler groups to attack UNRWA's Jerusalem headquarters, disrupting its operations with the protection of Israeli authorities (UNRWA, 2024d).

Several bills have been introduced in the Israeli Knesset with the aim of closing UNRWA offices in Jerusalem. In February of this year, a draft law was proposed to evacuate these offices, arguing that UNRWA's role is solely to serve Palestinian refugees and that, since there are allegedly no refugees in Jerusalem, the agency has no reason to operate there. The bill also claims that UNRWA incites hatred against Israel and teaches «anti-Semitic» content in its schools (Middle East Monitor, 2024).

In May 2024, another draft law sought to declare UNRWA a terrorist organization, revoke its immunity and privileges as a UN agency, and sever all ties between Israel and the agency. Should this designation be formalized, UNRWA would fall under the provisions of Israel's Anti-Terrorism Law and Penal Code. On July 9, the so-called «Foreign Affairs and Security Committee» of the Israeli Knesset approved a draft law aimed at designating UNRWA as a terrorist organization. This proposal was subsequently referred for ratification in its first reading (Al-Jazeera, 2024a).

In May 2024, Israel demanded that UNRWA vacate its headquarters in Jerusalem, situated in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. This demand was justified by claims of unauthorized land use and the insistence that UNRWA pay at least \$7.2 million in back rent. Additionally, Israel called for the closure of UNRWA's vocational training center in Qalandia, alleging that the agency had unlawfully seized real estate in Jerusalem. These accusations are mere attempts to pressure UNRWA into shutting down its operations permanently, thereby crippling its ability to function in the city.

Amidst a legislative assault on UNRWA, settlers, protected by the Israeli police, have organized protests outside its headquarters, demanding its eviction. In a particularly aggressive act, they attempted to storm one of the agency's offices and set fire to the vicinity of a UNRWA building, resulting in damage and the temporary closure of its offices in Jerusalem for the safety of its employees (Al-Jazeera, 2024b). These actions form a crucial part of Israel's strategic objective to eliminate UNRWA altogether. The immediate aim of dissolving UNRWA's presence in Jerusalem is to accelerate the forced displacement of Palestinians from the city and to eradicate any international connection to them, obstructing Israel's efforts to further its projects of urban Israeliation and potentially paving the way for the division of the city.

Israel's actions against UNRWA—particularly in the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem—constitute a blatant violation of international law and humanitarian principles. For over seven decades, Israel has operated with impunity, aided by the complicity of powerful states within the international system, creating a conducive environment for the targeting and dismantling of this vital organization. While UNRWA has frequently acquiesced to Israeli demands due to the political blackmail exerted



by its backers, such concessions have not deterred Israel or reduced the intensity of its assaults on the agency.

A fundamental issue lies in the fact that both the international community and UNRWA have approached the recurring financial crises—leading to the imposition of political conditions—without considering the broader context and underlying causes. This oversight has compelled them to accept the political and security stipulations imposed by donors. Similarly, the Arab states’ engagement within this context has resulted in significant contributions to UNRWA’s budget, which may ultimately shift the burden of responsibility for the Palestinian refugee issue to a Palestinian-Arab framework, potentially absolving the international community of its obligations (see: *Peace to Prosperity*, 2020).

Available Ways and Mechanisms to Protect UNRWA

In light of the challenges facing UNRWA and the relentless Israeli campaign against it, it is evident that the agency’s financial crises and ongoing political assaults are part of a broader Israeli strategy rather than isolated incidents. As the international community stands seemingly powerless to uphold and safeguard UNRWA, there is an urgent need for a coordinated effort—both official and grassroots—at local and international levels. This effort must confront the root causes of the crisis and transcend mere temporary solutions or reactive rhetoric.

It is crucial to recognize that addressing the ramifications of UNRWA’s financial and political turmoil without examining its historical and political context has only complicated the situation. Such an approach has facilitated the targeting of UNRWA and its personnel, particularly during the ongoing war in Gaza. To devise a strategic plan for protecting UNRWA, we must anchor our efforts in specific principles and foundations that reflect a unified perspective, rooted in the very issues that necessitated UNRWA’s establishment.

These guiding principles can be distilled into two fundamental points:

First, the responsibility for the emergence and persistence of the Palestinian refugee issue rests squarely with the international community. This community has provided political cover for Zionist movements that displaced Palestinians and has allowed them to be deprived of their rights for over 76 years, including



their rights to return, restore property, and seek compensation.

Second, the United Nations bears the responsibility of providing international protection to Palestinian refugees until it can fulfill General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948. This obligation cannot be delegated to any other entity.

From these principles, the refugee issue should be reinstated to its rightful political and legal context as a collective asylum matter, rather than being viewed solely as a humanitarian crisis. It cannot be bypassed or managed through mechanisms detached from its political and historical realities. The prolonged suffering of refugees for over seven decades can be attributed to the empowerment of Israel, the international community's failure to implement its own decisions, and the complicity of some countries allied with Israel.

Thus, the mechanism for protecting UNRWA must prioritize the defense of its physical existence and legal-political role, rather than limiting the focus solely to the humanitarian and relief services it provides.

Given that the attack on UNRWA is fundamentally political, the primary responsibility for confronting this campaign lies with the political forces, especially the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), supported by local and international civil society and the broader Palestinian community. To effectively address the roots of the UNRWA crisis, the PLO must prioritize the Palestinian refugee issue, which has been sidelined in favor of final solutions.

The Israeli assault on UNRWA has persisted since the agency's inception, but it intensified significantly following the signing of the Oslo Accords, with clear demands for its dismantling becoming increasingly prominent. Many of the countries that fund UNRWA have justified their reduced support by alleging the agency's alignment with the Palestinian Authority, an attempt to shift the burden of responsibility for Palestinian refugees onto the PA.

The absence of a unified Palestinian strategy to combat both international inaction and collusion has led to a retreat by countries and international bodies from fulfilling their obligations. The fragmentation of Palestinian civil society institutions, along with the prioritization of donor agendas over national needs—such as grants aimed at replacing UNRWA—further weakens the visibility of the Palestinian refugee issue, their rights, and the institutions that serve them.



To counter these challenges, the PLO must elevate this issue to genuine priority, not merely rhetoric. It should propose a draft resolution to the United Nations General Assembly, backed by an international awareness and advocacy campaign based on the principles outlined above. This initiative should include a comprehensive approach to addressing the structural problems within UNRWA and its mandate, thereby equipping the agency to effectively confront the Israeli assault. Key actions should include:

Expanding UNRWA's Personal, Legal, and Geographical Mandate:

This involves broadening the definition of a Palestinian refugee and displaced person to encompass the concept of forced displacement, rather than merely those in need of humanitarian aid. The operational definition of UNRWA was suitable at its inception due to the existence and effectiveness of the International Conciliation Commission, tasked with implementing Resolution 194. However, in the absence of this Commission, and given the ongoing forced displacement and suffering of refugees, it is imperative to reevaluate the definition of a refugee through a rights-based lens.

Additionally, the resolution should encompass an expansion of UNRWA's legal and geographical mandate, enabling the agency to provide both physical and legal protection to Palestinian refugees worldwide, rather than limiting its support to the five areas of operation.

Given the failure of the International Conciliation Commission for Palestine to fulfill its responsibilities toward Palestinian refugees, it is imperative to enhance UNRWA's authority in defending the humanitarian rights of these individuals.

This enhancement is vital in light of state negligence and discrimination against Palestinians. UNRWA is uniquely positioned as the most effective agency to offer protection to Palestinian refugees. Its functional nature allows it to play a fundamental, politically impartial role in enforcing paragraph 11 of Resolution 194.

Establishing a Special UN Fund to Finance UNRWA

To free UNRWA from the political interference of influential states and to ensure a guaranteed, adequate, and sustainable budget, it is essential to detach the agency from the mechanisms of voluntary contributions and bilateral agreements with donor states. This fund, a sub-fund of the United Nations, would structure contributions into two categories: mandatory contributions to cover the basic programs of UNRWA, and voluntary contributions for emergency situations and additional humanitarian interventions.

For UNRWA's core budget, basic services and programs must be included in the mandatory contributions to the United Nations Fund. This inclusion should reflect the increasing number of refugees and their escalating needs, rather than relying solely on voluntary donations that may serve political interests. In any case, whether contributions are mandatory or voluntary, they should not occur through a bilateral relationship between UNRWA and donor countries. Such bilateral arrangements allow for political interference in UNRWA's affairs and enable donor nations to impose conditions that could undermine the agency's neutrality and functional role.

Establishing this fund would formalize the relationship between UNRWA and the United Nations, freeing the agency from external political agendas. This shift would restore accountability to the international body responsible for the creation of the Palestinian refugee issue and the prolonged failure to resolve it.

Adopting International Standards in UNRWA's Management

In light of the ongoing Israeli campaign against UNRWA, the agency must unveil this assault and contextualize it within its political and historical framework. It should not be compelled to justify its mandate in response to Israel's persistent accusations. The demands placed upon UNRWA—such as altering curricula

and adhering to inspection protocols—lie outside its jurisdiction and would only serve to amplify its burdens. UNRWA is not obligated to adjust its mandate to accommodate Israeli interests or align with colonial Western notions of terrorism, rights, or peace. Its primary reference must be the United Nations General Assembly and its mandate, rather than Israeli political objectives or the expectations of donor nations like the United States, the European Union, Britain, and Canada.

Protecting UNRWA and Its Staff

As an institution established by the international community, UNRWA is entitled to protection from that same community. The international body must uphold its obligations to safeguard the agency and its personnel, including Palestinian staff, while facilitating its operations like any other UN entity in accordance with international law. This foundational principle necessitates that the United Nations intervene decisively and effectively against Israeli measures and legislation targeting UNRWA.

In this context, it is essential to remember that the General Assembly holds the capacity and authority to reevaluate Israel's membership in the United Nations based on its adherence to the UN Charter, international agreements, and pertinent resolutions, particularly Resolution 194 of 1948.

Confronting Projects to Replace UNRWA

Palestinian civil society, including institutions and popular committees within refugee camps, must resolutely oppose foreign projects funded by governments complicit with Israel. These initiatives, particularly in the West Bank, aim to offer services that mirror or replicate those provided by UNRWA, seeking to marginalize and ultimately replace the agency. This strategy of substituting UNRWA with cost-effective intermediary institutions has become a troubling trend, supported by international actors that simultaneously obstruct UNRWA's funding.

The replacement of UNRWA with cheaper international entities poses a significant strategic risk; there is no guarantee that these alternatives will maintain their operations. The political forces, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and popular committees must resist the allure of these low-cost solutions and reaffirm

UNRWA's primary role. Furthermore, it is vital to highlight the Israeli efforts aimed at excluding UNRWA from distributing humanitarian aid and providing essential services in the Gaza Strip, advocating instead for the formation of alternative international and local bodies. Upholding UNRWA's centrality serves as a protective shield against the manipulation of aid as a tool to foster loyalty to Israel and its allies within Gaza.

In conclusion, UNRWA's experiences over the past seven decades underscore that true reform cannot be achieved by merely addressing the symptoms of a problem; it necessitates confronting its root causes. It is noteworthy that the international and Arab initiatives aimed at mitigating the impacts of UNRWA's crises have often exacerbated the situation rather than alleviating it. Therefore, the development of a national-legal program by the Palestine Liberation Organization to protect UNRWA, grounded in these principles, has become an urgent necessity, especially in the face of Israel's ongoing campaign against the Palestinian people across various regions.

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