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One Hundred Eighteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

January 15, 2024

Mr. Philippe Lazzarini
Commissioner-General
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)
Under-Secretary-General
United Nations

Dear Mr. Philippe Lazzarini:

As you know, the United States of America is the single largest donor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In 2022, the Biden administration donated \$344 million to UNRWA, and has continued to donate hundreds of millions of dollars throughout 2023 and during the Israel-Hamas war.¹

However, there have been a number of concerning reports that have called into question the very mission and effectiveness of UNRWA. Recently, the Israel Defense Force alleged that Hamas terrorists are stealing UNRWA food and supplies intended for humanitarian purposes.² Though UNRWA has denied these most recent allegations, diversion of food, fuel, and supplies by terrorist organizations, like Hamas, is not a new problem.³

In fact, the risk of diversion in the region is so high that the USAID Office of Inspector General (USAID OIG) issued a fraud awareness alert after the Biden administration provided \$100 million in aid through USAID, UN agencies, such as UNRWA, and other international NGOs. Specifically, USAID OIG stated its investigative priority is, "...to ensure that assistance does not fall into the hands of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) including, but not limited to,

¹ UNRWA, "Funding Trends," *UNRWA.org*, December 31, 2022, <https://www.unrwa.org/how-you-can-help/government-partners/funding-trends>; UNRWA, "The United States Contributes US\$ 153.7 Million to UNRWA in Support of Palestine Refugees," *UNRWA.org*, June 1, 2023, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/news-releases/united-states-contributes-us-1537-million-unrwa-support-palestine-refugees>.

² Meet the Press, "IDF Spokesperson claims 'Hamas goes into UNRWA facilities and takes food' intended for relief," *NBC News*, December 26, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/idf-spokesperson-claims-hamas-goes-into-unrwa-facilities-and-takes-food-intended-for-relief-200964165779>.

³ Lazzarini, Philippe, "The Gaza Strip: UNRWA calls for unimpeded and safe access to deliver much needed humanitarian aid," *UNRWA.org*, December 29, 2023, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/gaza-strip-unrwa-calls-unimpeded-and-safe-access-deliver-much-needed>.

Hamas.”⁴ USAID OIG went on to say that it, “...has identified deliberate interference and efforts to divert humanitarian assistance in regions where FTO activity is prevalent ... [t]his includes systemic coercion of aid workers by FTOs...”⁵ We must be clear-eyed about the reality that diversion by Hamas is a real threat and one that is very likely happening with UNRWA aid.

We also remain concerned by UNRWA’s repeated failure to uphold United Nations standards of neutrality in the agency’s operations in Gaza. Hamas tunnels have been found suspiciously close to UNRWA schools, as these terrorists continue to use children and their schools as human shields.⁶ There have been blatant and repeated instances of UNRWA employees, including teachers, using anti-Semitic rhetoric and posting messages of anti-Israel hate on social media.⁷ Assessments by NGOs continue to reveal anti-Israel content in educational materials used in UNRWA schools, which increases our concern that UNRWA, through this curriculum, has in some way aided Hamas’ call to destroy Israel (most recently, we have seen extremely troubling reports that an Israeli hostage was held in an UNRWA teacher’s attic after being kidnapped in the October 7th Hamas attacks).⁸

Our constituents are horrified that their taxpayer dollars may have, through UNRWA failures, supported Hamas terrorists. Therefore, we request that you appear before the House Foreign Affairs Committee to answer our questions and address the concerns of the American people. We ask that you indicate your willingness and availability to appear before the Committee by no later than January 24th, 2024.

Sincerely,



Michael T. McCaul
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee



Brian Mast
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight
and Accountability

⁴ USAID Office of the Inspector General, *Gaza Response – Fraud Awareness November 2023*, https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/Situational%20Alert%20-%20Diversion%20and%20Material%20Support_0.pdf.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Fabien, Emanuel, “IDF says it destroyed Hamas tunnel next to UNRWA School,” *The Times of Israel*, November 8, 2023, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/idf-says-it-destroyed-hamas-tunnel-next-to-unrwa-school-in-gaza/; Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), “Hamas Terror Tunnel Next to UNRWA School in Gaza Destroyed,” November 10, 2023, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/11/10/hamas-terror-tunnel-next-to-unrwa-school-in-gaza-destroyed/>.

⁷ UN Watch, “UN Teachers Call to Murder Jews, Reveals New Report,” March 14, 2023, <https://unwatch.org/un-teachers-call-to-murder-jews-reveals-new-report/>.

⁸ The Jerusalem Post, “Released hostage says he was held by UNRWA teacher in Gaza – report,” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 30, 2023, Updated: December 2, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-775777>; UN Watch and IMPACT-se, *UNRWA Education: Reform or Regression? A Review of UNRWA Teachers and Schools Concerning Incitement to Hate and Violence*, March 2023, <https://unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023-Report-UNRWA.pdf>.



Christopher H. Smith
Chairman
Subcommittee on Global Health,
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Darrell Issa
Member of Congress

CC:
Rep. Gregory W. Meeks, Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee