

Advocacy Teams



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on the UNRWA Funding Emergency Restoration Act

1. Why is Gaza facing a humanitarian catastrophe?

Following the devastating assaults by Hamas in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, claiming the lives of over 1,200 Israelis and capturing more than 230 hostages, Israel has responded with a violent military campaign and extensive blockade on Gaza. This has resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Palestinians, with more than half being women and children, plunging Gaza into a humanitarian catastrophe. Conditions of famine, disease outbreaks, and a severe shortage of medical supplies continue to worsen an existing crisis for over 2 million Palestinians in Gaza.

2. What role does UNRWA play in Gaza and the region?

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the backbone of the aid response in Gaza, with over 13,000 employees in the territory. It provides food, healthcare, education, and other services to millions of Palestinian refugees across Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. UNRWA's operations are vital for maintaining stability and addressing the basic needs of these communities.

UNRWA was established by a United Nations General Assembly Resolution in 1949 to carry out direct relief programs for Palestine refugees displaced in the Nakba, the violence suffered by Palestinians following the establishment of the state of Israel. The Agency began operations in 1950 and has provided vital relief to Palestinian civilians in need ever since.

3. What is the UNRWA Funding Emergency Restoration Act?

This bicameral legislation, introduced by Sen. Peter Welch (VT) and Reps. Andre Carson (IN-7), Pramila Jayapal (WA-7), and Jan Schakowsky (IL-9), seeks to lift congressional restrictions on U.S. funding for UNRWA. It calls on the Biden administration to restore its support for the

agency, which is essential for addressing the dire humanitarian needs in Gaza and ensuring aid delivery to millions of Palestinian refugees.

4. Why was U.S. funding for UNRWA suspended?

In January 2024, the U.S. paused funding to UNRWA following Israeli allegations that some agency staff in Gaza were linked to Hamas's attacks on Oct. 7. UNRWA has acted decisively, firing staff accused of violations and implementing stronger oversight measures to ensure accountability and neutrality. As the facts continue to come in, it has become clear there was an overreaction and unjustified rush to judgment against UNRWA by U.S. policymakers.

5. What actions has UNRWA taken to address the allegations?

UNRWA and the UN have taken significant steps, including:

- Firing all identified employees accused of violations.
- Conducting an independent, external review of its neutrality measures and procedures.
- Implementing new transparency protocols and strengthening its oversight mechanisms.
- Creating a task force to oversee reforms and ensure compliance with neutrality standards.

These efforts demonstrate UNRWA's commitment to integrity and accountability in its operations.

6. How have other countries responded to these allegations?

Of the 15 other countries that had initially suspended their funding to UNRWA, all have since resumed their support. These nations include key U.S. allies like the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, the EU, and Japan. It's time for the United States to join this group and restore this urgently needed funding.

7. What are the broader implications of cutting U.S. funding to UNRWA?

Restoring U.S. funding for UNRWA would provide essential aid to millions of Palestinian refugees and prevent further deterioration of humanitarian conditions in Gaza. Moreover, it could contribute to regional stability and align the U.S. with its allies who have resumed funding. Restoring this funding is also a moral obligation to support vulnerable Palestinians in crisis.

Congress can take immediate action by cosponsoring and passing the UNRWA Funding Emergency Restoration Act. Members can also advocate that UNRWA funding is restored via the FY 2025 and FY 2026 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Acts. This will ensure that aid reaches those in need, alleviate suffering, and support long-term stability and peace in the region.

8. Why is the UNRWA Funding Emergency Restoration Act important?

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9. Why can't other foreign aid programs step in to provide the assistance that UNRWA does?

UNRWA is irreplaceable because its comprehensive mandate uniquely positions it as a lifeline for Palestinian refugees, providing far more than basic aid. It serves as the cornerstone of education, healthcare, social services, infrastructure, and protection for Palestinian refugees—services no other entity can replicate at this scale or efficiency. By upholding the dignity and rights of those it serves, UNRWA promotes human development and stability until a just and lasting solution is achieved.

In Gaza especially, UNRWA's services are indispensable; there is simply no alternative to meet the scale of need. Its presence ensures that critical support, like schooling for children, medical care, and emergency aid, reaches vulnerable individuals amid ongoing crises. Without UNRWA, millions of refugees would face devastating gaps in essential services. It is imperative that we protect and fully support UNRWA's mandate. It is not only a custodian of Palestinian refugees' well-being but also an irreplaceable partner in fostering resilience and hope for a better future.