

Amnesty Says Cutting Off Aid to UNRWA While Arming Israel Is ‘Stark’ Hypocrisy

By [Jake Johnson](#)

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[Amnesty International](#) on Monday joined the [growing global chorus](#) denouncing Israel’s allies for suspending aid to the United Nations’ Palestinian refugee agency even as they continue to support the Israeli military’s war on the Gaza Strip, risking [complicity in genocide](#).

Agnès Callamard, Amnesty’s secretary-general and the former U.N. special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, [said](#) that while Israel’s claim that a dozen staffers at the refugee agency played a role Hamas’ October 7 attack is “serious and must be independently investigated,” the “alleged actions of a few individuals must not be used as a pretext for cutting off lifesaving assistance in what could amount to collective punishment.”

“Some of the very governments that announced they will cut off funds to UNRWA over these allegations have, in the meantime, continued to arm Israeli forces despite overwhelming evidence that these arms are used to commit war crimes and serious human rights violations,” said Callamard. “Rushing to freeze funds for humanitarian aid, based on allegations that are still being investigated, while refusing to even consider suspending support for the Israeli military is a stark example of double standards.”

“Instead of suspending vital funding to those in need,” Callamard added, “states should be working to halt arms transfers to Israel and Palestinian armed groups and pushing for an immediate and sustained cease-fire and full humanitarian access to help alleviate devastating suffering.”

The United States announced last week that it would temporarily cut off UNRWA funding as it reviews Israel’s [allegations](#) against the low-level agency employees—a decision that came just hours after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) [ruled](#) that Israel must ensure the provision of humanitarian aid to Gazans, tens of thousands of whom have been killed or

wounded by Israeli bombs and shells in less than four months.

Francesca Albanese, the U.N. special rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian territories, [said](#) that “defunding UNRWA at this critical time overtly defies” the ICJ’s ruling.

Médecins Sans Frontières, also known as Doctors Without Borders, [similarly warned](#) Monday that “the consequences these cuts in funding will have on the ground contradict the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice.”

“The humanitarian crisis has reached catastrophic levels,” the group added, “and any additional limitations on aid will result in more deaths and suffering.”

Just over a week before the Biden administration decided to suspend its UNRWA contributions, a spokesperson for the U.S. State Department described the agency’s work as “invaluable” and “lifesaving.”

Jan 17—9 days before ICJ trial:

State Dept. Spox Matt Miller: "UNRWA has done and continues to do invaluable work to address the humanitarian situation in Gaza at great personal risk to UNRWA members...over 100 UNRWA staff members have been killed doing this lifesaving work." pic.twitter.com/ckTHFhU2zc

— Prem Thakker (@prem_thakker) [January 29, 2024](#)

On Monday, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [acknowledged](#) that the UNRWA “has played and continues to play an absolutely indispensable role in trying to make sure that men, women, and children who so desperately need assistance in Gaza actually get it.”

“And no one else can play the role that UNRWA’s been playing, certainly not in the near term,” he added. “So that only underscores the importance of UNRWA tackling this as quickly, as effectively, and as thoroughly as possible, and that’s what we’re looking for.”

At least a dozen countries—including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands—have joined the U.S. in suspending aid to the UNRWA, the most critical humanitarian aid organization in the [famine-stricken](#) Gaza Strip.

The moves have put the UNRWA’s operations in jeopardy, with the U.N. chief warning that the agency’s current funding levels won’t be enough to meet all of its requirements in February. The agency has [no strategic financial reserves](#).

Amnesty said the countries that have suspended aid to the UNRWA thus far provided more than half of the agency’s budget in 2022.

Several major nations, including Norway and Spain, have refused to join the U.S.-led freeze of aid to the UNRWA, which the Israeli government has been targeting for years and is [hoping to push out of Gaza entirely](#). The UNRWA quickly fired nine of the 12 workers that Israel accused of taking part in the October 7 attack and has [launched an investigation](#).

On Monday, Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said his country will not suspend

UNRWA funding, which he said helps “alleviate the terrible humanitarian situation in Gaza.”

Albares also pledged to continue pushing for an end to Israel’s assault on Gaza, the release of hostages, and a lasting diplomatic solution.

“We will not resign ourselves to watching more innocent women, men, and children killed in Gaza and more suffering of Palestinian families,” he said. “We will not resign ourselves to keep watching the suffering of the families of hostages. The violence must stop.”

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Jake Johnson is a senior editor and staff writer for Common Dreams.

Featured image: Families have been forced to moved repeatedly in Gaza. UN United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

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