

Israeli PM Calls for Dismantling of UN Palestinian Refugee Agency

UNRWA aids millions of Palestinian refugees, but Netanyahu accuses UNRWA of anti-Israel incitement

By [Middle East Monitor](#)

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on Sunday for the dismantling of the UN agency that aids millions of Palestinian refugees, accusing it of anti-Israeli incitement and saying he had conveyed his message to the US ambassador to the United Nations.

Adnan Abu Hasna, a Gaza-based spokesman for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), said Netanyahu was pursuing a “fantasy”. The United States, Israel’s main ally, was the biggest donor to UNRWA last year, pledging \$368 million.

In public remarks to his cabinet at its weekly meeting, Netanyahu said UNRWA perpetuated, rather than solved, the Palestinian refugee problem and that anti-Israeli incitement was rife in its institutions, which includes schools.

“It is time UNRWA be dismantled and merged with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,” Netanyahu said.

Referring to a meeting he held in Jerusalem on Wednesday with Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the UN, Netanyahu said:

I told her it was time the United Nations re-examine UNRWA’s existence

UNRWA was established by the UN General Assembly in 1949 after hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes in the 1948 war that followed Israel’s creation. It says it currently aids five million registered Palestinian refugees in the Middle East.

Chris Gunness, UNRWA’s chief spokesman, said in an email to *Reuters* that only the General Assembly, by a majority vote, could change the agency’s mandate.

“In December 2016, UNRWA’s mandate was extended for three years by the General Assembly by a large majority,” he added.

UNRWA’s spokesperson Abu Hasna, speaking in Hebrew on *Israel Radio*, cautioned that if

“UNRWA is gone” in the Gaza Strip, where its food, educational and health services are crucial,

two million people will turn into Daesh supporters

In a statement issued in response to Netanyahu’s calls, Ben Jamal, director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, said:

“There is only one reason that the UNRWA provides crucial humanitarian support to five million Palestinian refugees – the continuing illegal occupation of Palestinian land by the Israeli military and state and the denial of the right of return.”

Netanyahu’s notion that the UNRWA ‘perpetuates’ Palestine’s refugee problem suggests a break with reality. Netanyahu’s defence minister Avigdor Lieberman said that disloyal Palestinian citizens of Israel should be beheaded, and his justice minister Ayelet Shaked described Palestinian children as ‘little snakes’. Let’s take his complaints about incitement with a pinch of salt.

Featured image: UNRWA

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