

States Defunding UNRWA May be Violating Genocide Convention: Expert

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By [The New Arab](#)

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A UN expert warned Sunday that countries defunding the UN agency for Palestinian refugees were breaching a court order to provide effective aid in [Gaza](#) and could be violating the international genocide convention.

A number of donor countries – including Australia, Britain, Finland, Germany and Italy – on Saturday followed the lead of the United States in suspending additional funding to [UNRWA](#).

That came after Israel alleged that several of the UN agency's staff members were involved in Hamas's 7 October attack. The Israeli allegations were based on confessions obtained in interrogations and have not been independently investigated. Israel has killed more than 150 UNRWA staff in Gaza since the start of its latest offensive on Gaza.

Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian territories, warned that the decision to pause funding to UNRWA “overtly defies” the order by the International Court of Justice to allow effective humanitarian assistance” to reach Gazans.

“This will entail legal responsibilities – or the demise of the (international) legal system,” she wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

UNRWA reacted to the allegations by firing several staff and promising a thorough investigation into the unspecified claims, but Israel has nonetheless vowed to stop the agency's work in Gaza after the war.

The row between Israel and UNRWA follows the UN's International Court of Justice ruling on Friday that Israel must prevent possible acts of genocide in the conflict and allow more aid into Gaza.

Albanese, who is an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, but who does not speak on behalf of the United Nations, highlighted the timing of the defunding decisions.

“The day after ICJ concluded that Israel is plausibly committing genocide in Gaza, some states decided to defund UNRWA,” she said in a separate post on X.

By doing so, she said, countries are “collectively punishing millions of Palestinians at the most critical time, and most likely violating their obligations under the Genocide Convention”.

Hamas's 7 October attack on Israel resulted in about 1,140 deaths, according to an AFP tally of official figures. Emerging evidence indicates that both Palestinian militants and Israel were responsible for civilian deaths.

Militants also seized about 250 hostages and Israel says around 132 of them remain in Gaza, including the bodies of at least 28 dead captives.

Israel's ensuing military offensive has killed at least 26,422 people, most of them women and children, in Gaza, according to the health ministry in the coastal enclave.

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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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