Trump administration to Post: White House was right about UNRWA corruption

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The former head of the United Nations’ Palestinian aid agency who resigned in the face of an inquiry into misconduct allegations has denied any wrongdoing, and said his agency was the victim of a political campaign designed to undermine it.

Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl, a Swiss diplomat, was replaced on Wednesday, pending completion of a review of “management-related matters” at the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees ([UNRWA](https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/UNRWA-in-trouble-604632)), the agency said.

“I have rejected these allegations from the start and will continue to do so,” Krahenbuhl said in an interview with Swiss broadcaster RTS on Wednesday evening. “There is no corruption, fraud, or misappropriation of aid.”

In a resignation letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, obtained by Reuters, Krahenbuhl complained the inquiry “has been fraught with leaks...despite your personal commitment to confidentiality.”

He denied what he called “the unfounded allegation that I entertained a romantic relationship with a staff member.”

His tenure at cash-strapped UNRWA saw frequent clashes with US President Donald Trump’s administration, which has suggested refugee host countries should take over UNRWA’s services across the Middle East.

UNRWA has faced budgetary difficulties since last year, when the US – its biggest donor – halted its aid of $360 million per year. [The United States and Israel](https://www.jpost.com/International/Israel-US-to-push-for-UNRWA-oversight-when-mandate-is-renewed-606368) have both accused UNRWA of mismanagement and anti-Israeli incitement.

An administration official told The Jerusalem Post on Thursday that the new revelations prove the problematic conduct of the UN agency, which the US peace team has warned about since the day President Donald Trump took office.

Jared Kushner, senior adviser and Trump’s son-in-law, has been a harsh critic of the agency. In April, Foreign Policy revealed a letter that Kushner forwarded on January 11, 2018, to various current and former government officials, including former UN ambassador Nikki Haley, former national security adviser H. R. McMaster, and Jason Greenblatt, Trump’s former special envoy to the Middle East.

“It’s very important to have an honest and sincere effort to disrupt UNWRA,” wrote Kushner. UNRWA “perpetuates a status quo, is corrupt, inefficient, and doesn’t help peace. Our goal can’t be to keep things stable as they are, our goal had to be to make things significantly BETTER! Sometimes, you have to strategically risk breaking things in order to get there.”

For some time now, Kushner has “approached this issue from a different lens,” the administration official told the Post. The most recent news has shown that he was correct in his assessment that UNRWA was corrupt. The administration laid out in Bahrain an economic vision of $50 billion, which can revitalize the Palestinian economy. We are focused on ensuring that every dollar of financial aid is used to help the Palestinian people and not be misappropriated.”

Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium have separately suspended payments to UNRWA over the management issues that are now under investigation. The agency’s spokeswoman says it still needs $89 million to keep operating until the end of this year.