**UNRWA: the Greatest Obstacle to Peace**

Middle East Forum

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U.S. President Donald Trump's State of the Union address, alongside reports that his administration intends to put an end to the problematic definition of Palestinian refugeeism by which descendants of refugees are also granted refugee status, constitutes an important turning point in efforts to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Unlike the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, which is dedicated to helping the world's refugees, the U.N. Relief and Works Agency, the agency dedicated solely to Palestinian refugees, has created its own unique definition of who is considered a Palestinian refugee. As a result of UNRWA's criteria, there are now around 5.3 million Palestinian refugees around the world. This definition is significant in that it ensures the number of refugees will continue to grow and so make a solution to the conflict ever more elusive.

Furthermore, instead of incentivizing initiatives that promote a culture of peace among Palestinians and pouring money into purely humanitarian efforts, UNRWA works to create and cultivate a victimhood mentality in Palestinian society through ongoing incitement and the rejection of peace. In UNRWA-run schools, students are taught to believe they will one day be able to "return" to all the lands of Israel and bring an end to the Jewish state. Here, too, the dangerous irony of a humanitarian organization, which, instead of solving the refugee problem, in fact, works to ensure its perpetuation, is apparent.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' recent remarks against Zionism and the Jews' right to self-determination make it clear that Palestinian recalcitrance is the root of the conflict. As with every other conflict in human history, this conflict will end only when the side that created it is willing to abandon its grandiose ambitions. This position has recently been presented in the Middle East Forum's Israel Victory Project, which calls for the suspension of diplomatic ties with the Palestinians until they renounce their efforts to bring an end to the Jewish state. In addition, the Middle East Forum calls for major reforms to UNRWA so as to separate its political efforts from the agency's humanitarian mission.

The United States' definition of a refugee is similar to that of other countries. According to this accepted definition, refugee status is not passed down by inheritance and is not valid for those persons who are citizens of other countries or who live in what is supposedly their own territory. In contrast, more than 2 million Palestinian "refugees" live in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, lands they claim constitute part of their territorial homeland.

If we remove from UNRWA's list of refugees those people who do not meet any of the three criteria, we will then come back to a more reasonable number of somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 Palestinian refugees from the 1948 War of Independence. The remainder could, of course, request humanitarian aid, but they would not be considered refugees by UNRWA.

If the countries of the world are interested in funding genuine humanitarian aid for the Palestinians, this can be done through a variety of alternative channels, whose aim is to create a better future for the population. But first, they must stop using the term "refugees." This is not just a question of semantics: A change in terminology could give the Palestinians hope for a better future instead of ensuring they maintain the victimhood mentality and pass it on to future generations. Second, they must only release funds for the Palestinians on the condition they are then integrated into their host countries or alternatively, those Palestinians living outside Judea, Samaria Gaza find a third country to which to emigrate. Third, they must ensure the funds do not go toward terrorism and incitement.

The implementation of these steps will lead the PA to acknowledge its defeat in the war against the Jewish people's right to self-determination and will put an end to the Palestinian leadership's cynical use of their people and their supporters for the prevention of a solution to the conflict and finally bring about peace.