**[Israeli NGO Details UNRWA Links to Terrorism, Says Group is Obstacle to Peace](http://www.algemeiner.com/2015/07/03/israeli-ngo-details-unrwa-links-to-terrorism-says-group-is-obstacle-to-peace/" \o "Permanent Link to Israeli NGO Details UNRWA Links to Terrorism, Says Group is Obstacle to Peace)**

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According to a position paper published by an Israeli non-partisan NGO, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), is “actively being counterproductive to a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

The paper, which was published by the independent political think-tank, the Institute for Zionist Strategies (IZS), argues that UNRWA facilities have been used for terrorist activity against civilians, and that UNRWA employees often are members of terrorist groups.

Additionally, the paper claims that UNRWA is financially and politically dependent on the continuation of the status-quo in the Mideast conflict, and therefore is not motivated by an actual desire to solve the problems of refugees.

The paper was composed and researched by Lt. Col. Nir Naaman, currently a Doctoral Student at Bar-Ilan University, for IZS. He cites news articles from the last decade, UN resolutions, national and governmental databases, and related academic literature as resources.

The report cites instances in which UNRWA was allegedly “caught” turning a blind eye to terrorist activities or even being fully involved in such activities, dating as far back as 1968, when an UNRWA camp was used as a training base for the PLO, then still an official terrorist organization.

More recently, the paper mentions cases during last summer’s Operation Protective Edge in Gaza, when Hamas terrorists opened fire on Israeli troops from UNRWA facilities, stored ammunition and missiles in UNRWA schools, and had numerous members on the UNRWA payroll.

Giving at least 10 specific examples of cases that cast doubt on UNRWA’s partiality and show links between the refugee organization and Hamas, the paper concludes that UNRWA’s activities should be halted, at least in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, and that funds and duties be transferred to the legitimate Palestinian Authority and the International Refugee Organization (UNHCR).

Adi Arbel, Project Manager for the IZS, talked to Tazpit News Agency about the report.

“Our conclusion is that UNRWA causes more damage than good,” says Arbel. “In Gaza they have become a clear actor in the conflict rather than an impartial international relief organization.”

“The report presents proven factual cases,” said Arbel. “It names names of UNRWA officials, teachers, full employees who have been directly linked to Hamas, who have been caught by Israeli authorities in the act“.

One of the cases cited is a 2003 incident in which a number of Palestinian UNRWA employees were arrested and convicted of throwing Molotov cocktails at an Israeli bus.

According to the paper, an FBI report was published this year claiming that dozens and maybe even hundreds of UNRWA employees are directly involved in terrorism. However, the FBI report itself was not cited or presented in the position paper.

“Much data has been collected over the years by the Israeli security forces, as well as during previous military operations such as Pillar of Defense and Cast Lead, corroborating an existing link between the Agency [UNRWA] and anti-Israeli aggressive activity, especially terrorism,” Arbel told Tazpit. “Ever since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2006, the Agency has become a kind of executive branch of Hamas, employing many of the terrorist organization’s own people.”

“[UNRWA] has existed for 65 years with the mandate to solve and relieve the refugees resulting from the war of independence [the 1948 war], however all it succeeded in doing is sustaining their refugee status indefinitely, perpetuating it. Even worse, they are de facto creating more and more refugees.”

According to international law, refugee status is granted to individuals displaced and unable to return home as a result of an ongoing armed conflict or disaster that puts them in mortal danger. The status is lifted with the return of the individual to his home or the naturalization and citizenship in a new location; it is not a hereditary status.

UNRWA has no definition for the term “refugee” in its founding charter, and has been able to define refugees in an ad hoc fashion for years, granting status to children and grandchildren of refugees and even people who have been accepted as citizens in other countries.

Arbel said, “with UNRWA, one can be a great grandchild of a Jordanian Arab who arrived in Palestine in ’46, then left in ’48 to go back to Jordan, now he has full Jordanian citizenship – and yet is still considered a Palestinian refugee with all that entitles.”

“They even receive benefits and tax exemptions from the Israeli government. Did you know that UNRWA is absolutely exempt from excise tax in Israel? One of our future plans is to promote sanctions on UNRWA, take away their benefits and discounts they get from Israel, at least until they stop being partial and cooperating with terrorists, and using their schools for one sided education which perpetuates the conflict,” added Arbel.

Christopher Gunness, director of Advocacy and Strategic Communication for UNRWA, spoke to Tazpit News Agency, responding to the IZS position paper.

“As for the missiles and munitions stored in our facilities during Protective Edge, the only reason they know about it is because it was us who discovered them, we released this information to the public to begin with. We were just as shocked and appalled by this discovery, acted with integrity, and issued a strong press release on the matter.”

On the accusation of UNRWA employees being knowingly linked to terrorist militant activity, Gunness told Tazpit unequivocally that “it’s nonsense, these claims are garbage. Just like any other organization our employees are held to certain standards. If there is suspicion against any UNRWA employees they are investigated, and if any violations are found immediate action is taken, up to and including termination.”