Behind the Headlines: Hamas exploitation of World Vision in Gaza to support terrorism

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The director of the Gaza branch of World Vision diverted the humanitarian organization’s funds and resources from the needy to benefit Hamas’ terrorist and military activities.

**Introduction:**

World Vision is an international NGO, one of the largest charitable and humanitarian aid organizations in the world, which operates in more than 100 countries. It receives support primarily from the UN and from Western governments.

Israel has discovered that Mohammed El-Halabi, currently employed as director of the Gaza branch of World Vision, is actually a major figure in the terrorist/military arm of Hamas. El-Halabi has been taking advantage of his position to divert the humanitarian organization’s funds and resources from the needy to benefit Hamas’ terrorist and military activities.

In fact, more than half of World Vision’s resources in the Gaza Strip – originating in aid money from Western states such as the United States, England and Australia – were transferred to Hamas to strengthen its terrorist arm.

**Details:**

Mohammed El-Halabi (from the village of Jabalya, b. 1978), director of the Gaza branch of the international humanitarian aid organization World Vision, was arrested at the Erez Crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip on 15 June 2016. He was detained on suspicion of serious security offenses carried out for the terrorist arm of Hamas and of exploiting his visits to Israel for that purpose.

During the investigation, El-Halabi revealed that he has been a Hamas member since his youth and had undergone organizational and military training in the early 2000s.

In 2005, Hamas dispatched El-Halabi to infiltrate World Vision. El-Halabi related that Hamas believed that he had a good chance of infiltrating the humanitarian aid organization because his father works for the UN and he himself had worked in UNDP. In the latter capacity, he had employed “farmers” in areas close to Gaza’s border with Israel who in fact acted as lookouts for Hamas.

He added that his father, Halil El-Halabi, who has served as head of UNWRA’s educational institutions in the Gaza Strip for years, is a member of Hamas and uses his position as a UN employee to help the terrorist organization.

Shortly after being employed by World Vision, El-Halabi began to use his position to benefit the Islamist terrorist organization, primarily by diverting funds meant as aid to strengthen Hamas’ terrorist arm.

Over the years, El-Halabi advanced in the charity’s hierarchy until he was appointed director of the Gaza branch. In this capacity, he controlled the budget, equipment and aid packages which amounted to tens of millions of dollars.

El-Halabi employed a sophisticated and systematic apparatus for transferring World Vision funds [60% of the charity’s annual budget, according to El-Halabi] to Hamas.  
  
He established and promoted humanitarian projects and fictitious agricultural associations that acted as cover for the transfer of monies to Hamas. Examples of these projects and associations include: greenhouse construction; restoration of agricultural lands; mental health and public health projects for Gaza residents; aid to fishermen; a treatment center for the physically and mentally disabled; and farmers’ associations. All of these projects and associations were used to transfer funds to Hamas.

The money allocated by World Vision for projects and farmers’ associations reached Hamas in various ways, such as the false registration of Hamas terrorists as employees in charity-sponsored projects; issuing fictitious receipts and inflated invoices in which the difference paid by the charity was transferred in cash to Hamas; transfer of the charity’s checks to Hamas terrorists, etc.

The investigation revealed that the main method used to divert money to Hamas was to put out fictitious tenders for World Vision-sponsored projects in the Gaza Strip. The "winning" company was made aware that 60% of the project's monies were to be designated for Hamas. In this way, El-Halabi ensured a steady flow of cash into Hamas coffers.

According to El-Halabi, the funds he diverted to Hamas were intended mainly to strengthen the terrorist arm. As such, they were utilized to finance the digging of terror tunnels [not meant for smuggling but for attacks on communities in southern Israel and on Israeli security forces)], the building of military bases such as one code-named "Palestine" [built in 2015 entirely from British aid money] and the purchase of weapons.

Some of the money went to pay the salaries of Hamas terrorists and, in some cases, senior Hamas terrorists took large sums of money for their own personal use.

El-Halabi also used World Vision resources to provide logistical aid to the terrorist arm of Hamas. This, too, was the result of a sophisticated, well-oiled system that succeeded in transferring 60% of the humanitarian organization's resources in Gaza to Hamas.

El-Halabi regularly transferred to Hamas equipment that he had ordered on behalf of World Vision, supposedly for agricultural aid. The equipment included, inter alia, iron rods, digging equipment, pipes and building materials, and was used in fact to construct Hamas military outposts and to dig terror tunnels.

Just as El-Halabi exploited the humanitarian projects that he initiated in order to divert funds to Hamas, he also arranged for the provision of logistical support to Hamas. For instance, he initiated a greenhouse project in order to use the greenhouses to hide the sites where terror tunnels were being dug. In addition, a project for the rehabilitation of [fictitious] fishermen was actually used to provide motor boats and diving suits for Hamas' military marine unit.

Another regular method of acquiring equipment for Hamas was to disguise Hamas warehouses as World Vision warehouses. Trucks bringing supplies to the Kerem Shalom Crossing between Israel and Gaza would unload their goods at Hamas warehouses instead of legitimate World Vision warehouses. Hamas operatives would pick up the supplies in the dead of night.

According to El-Halabi, the humanitarian aid donated for the residents of the Gaza Strip was in actual fact given almost exclusively to Hamas terrorists and their families. Non-Hamas members almost never received any benefit from the aid, despite their relative level of need. Needless to say, this is in contradiction to the accepted practice of the humanitarian aid organizations.  Every month, El-Halabi distributed thousands of packages of food, basic commodities and medical supplies to Hamas terrorists and their families, commodities that World Vision had intended to go to the needy.

This humanitarian aid was diverted by El-Halabi to Hamas terrorists also during the conflict of summer 2014 [Operation Protective Edge]. During the fighting, the terrorists received food packages to sustain them above and below ground, including in terror tunnels.

In addition to the financial and logistical aid that El-Halabi provided Hamas, he also exploited his visits to Israel, which were permitted due to his legitimate work for World Vision, to engage in serious terrorist activity – locating and marking [via GPS] sites near the Erez Crossing that potentially could be used as egress points for Hamas attack tunnels.

The investigation revealed much information concerning additional figures in the Gaza Strip who exploited their work in organizations, including humanitarian aid organizations and UN institutions, on behalf of Hamas. El-Halabi's statements portray a troubling picture in which UN institutions in Gaza are in fact controlled by the Islamist terrorist organization Hamas.

In summary, the facts uncovered during this important investigation illustrate, above all else, Hamas' cynical exploitation of international humanitarian aid and resources donated by Western nations that are intended to aid needy residents of the Gaza Strip but which, in fact, are being diverted to Hamas for use in strengthening its terrorist and military capabilities. By its own actions, Hamas is harming the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, displaying its destructive priorities concerning Gaza.

**How Hamas exploited World Vision in Gaza to support its terrorist activities**

**World Vision**

·         World Vision is a respected global humanitarian aid organization operating in over 100 countries, with a budget of $2.6 billion (USD) and 46,000 employees.

·         World Vision is one of the largest aid organizations in the world and operates in collaboration with the UN.

·         World Vision has operated in Israel, the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and the Gaza Strip since 1975.

**The extent of World Vision funds channeled to the terrorist/military arm of Hamas**

·         60% of World Vision’s annual budget for the Gaza Strip was diverted by Hamas operative Mohammed El-Halabi to Hamas (approximately $7.2 million/year).

·         40% of the funds designated for civilian projects ($1.5 million/year) were given in cash to Hamas combat units.

·         Monies designated for the needy in Gaza ($4 million/year) were diverted to Hamas for the construction of terror tunnels and the purchase of weapons. **Terrorist/military projects build with World Vision funds**

·         A Hamas military base (code-named “Palestine”) was built using the aid organization’s money. $80,000 received from the United Kingdom went to construction costs of the base, paid in cash, while salaries were paid to terrorists who worked in the construction of the base.

·         The aid organization’s funds were diverted to finance the digging of terror tunnels leading from the Gaza Strip into Israel. [Note: These are not smuggling tunnels; they are designed to carry out attacks on civilian communities in Israel and Israeli security forces.]

·         Hamas received building materials from the aid organization that it used for its military facilities and terror tunnels, including iron rods, fences, greenhouse covers [used for camouflage purposes] and pipes.

·         During the Morsi regime in Egypt, El-Halabi diverted tens of thousands of dollars of the aid organization’s funds to purchase weapons in the Sinai, for Hamas.

**Food designated for the needy was transferred directly to Hamas military  units in northern Gaza**

·         2,500 food packages worth $100 each went to terrorists [total value $250,000].

3,300 packages of cleaning supplies and personal hygiene products worth $80 each were also given to Hamas units [total value $264,000].

**How the money was transferred to Hamas**

·         Some of the money raised to support injured children in Gaza was diverted to the families of Hamas terrorists, by fraudulently listing their children as wounded.

·         Money designated for psychological support, education and health in Gaza ($2 million/year) was used to pay the families of Hamas terrorists.

·         Part of the aid organization’s donations was transferred in cash and recorded fraudulently as aid to needy children.

·         Monies were paid out as salaries to Hamas terrorists and activists, who were registered as employees of the aid organization when in fact they never worked for World Vision.

·         Costs for legitimate infrastructure projects were inflated, with the difference going to Hamas.

·         Straw companies - two farmers' associations and a fake charity for the benefit of the injured - were established with false registers to launder money.

·         Unemployment payments were diverted to Hamas terrorists. El-Halabi arranged for one-third of the allowances World Vision transfers to Gaza for the unemployed to go to members of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. The terrorists also received a larger allowance (NIS 1500 instead of NIS 1250, or $300).

·         Using lists of fictitious beneficiaries, $2 million/year designated as aid for farmers was diverted to Hamas activists. El-Halabi reported a larger sum than that actually transferred to the farmers to World Vision. The difference was diverted to Hamas.

·         Project costs were inflated. For example, World Vision invests in many agricultural projects in northern Gaza, one of which involves the construction of 500 greenhouses and the preparation of land (495 acres) for agriculture. El-Halabi reported to the charity that the cost was $1,000 per quarter acre, while the real cost was $700. The difference – $300 per quarter acre - was transferred to Hamas.