# Israel slams Biden's resumption of UNRWA funding for Palestinians

April 8, 2021

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The Jerusalem Post

<https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/us-to-restore-about-150-million-in-aid-to-palestinians-664413>

Israel warned the Biden administration that its decision Wednesday to restore funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) would only help perpetuate the conflict.

"Israel's position is that the organization in its current form perpetuates the conflict and does not contribute to its resolution,” the Foreign Ministry stated.

The move was part of a larger American policy decision to begin restoration of humanitarian and security funding for Palestinians, which was cut out in its entirety by former US President Donald Trump.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s announcement of a $235 million package, including $150 million for UNRWA, was seen as the first step in the restoration of bilateral ties with the Palestinian Authority that had been severed during the Trump era.

Another $75 million of that package was earmarked for economic and development assistance and $10 million was granted for peace-building programs.

In addition to Wednesday’s announcement, some $40 million is expected to be allocated for Palestinian security forces and $15 million for COVID-19 assistance was set aside last month.

“We plan to restart US economic, development, and humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people,” Blinken said.

"The US is committed to advancing prosperity, security, and freedom for both Israelis and Palestinians in tangible ways in the immediate term, which is important in its own right, but also as a means to advance towards a negotiated two-state solution," he added.

The $290 million pledged by the Biden administration to date, is still not a full restoration of the $600 million allocated to the Palestinians during the last year of the Obama administration.

The Office of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and PA Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh welcomed the move and called on US President Joe Biden to take additional steps to advance Palestinian rights and to promote a two-state resolution to the conflict with Israel.

“We call upon the American administration to create a new political path that meets the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people based on international law and UN resolutions,” Shtayyeh tweeted.

US restoration of funding does not included direct financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority. The US Taylor Force Act of 2018 prohibits such direct funding until such time as the PA halts it monthly payments to terrorists and their families. Funding for Palestinian security forces was excluded from that legislation.

The Anti-Terror Clarification Act passed that same year had also created stumbling blocks to the provision of humanitarian assistance, but amendments to the legislation remove such impediments.

US State Department spokesman Ned Price clarified for reporters that all funding was legal under American law. “I just want to underscore that all of this aid is absolutely consistent with relevant US law, including those two statutes,” Price said.

Israel, however, took issue with US funding to UNRWA, which Trump had halted because he believes that the organized was flawed and a stumbling bloc to peace.

“The renewal of UNRWA assistance,” the Foreign Ministry said, “must be accompanied by substantial and necessary changes in the nature, goals and conduct of the organization.”

It added that the issue of UNRAW funding had come up in conversation between Israeli and American officials.

Ambassador to the UN Gilad Erdan said he had also warned the State Department of the danger of such activity, particularly without ensuring that “incitement” and “anti-Semitic content” are removed from its educational curriculum.

“Israel is strongly opposed to the anti-Israel and anti-Semitic activity happening in UNRWA’s facilities,” Erdan said.

"We believe that this UN agency for so-called “refugees” should not exist in its current format. UNRWA schools regularly use materials that incite against Israel and the twisted definition used by the agency to determine who is a “refugee” only perpetuates the conflict.

Blinken, however, specifically mentioned support for UNRWA's education program.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters in New York he hoped the US restoration of funding would sway other countries to do likewise.

“There were a number of countries that had greatly reduced or halted contributions to UNRWA. We hope that the American decision will lead others to rejoin... as UNRWA donors,” Dujarric said.

Among Israel’s objections to UNRWA, is its classification of descendants of some 750,000 Palestinians who fled their homes as a result of the 1948 War of Independence, and who now live in east Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, as refugees.

UNRWA, which provides food assistance as well as health and education services, has sought a $1.5 billion budget to serve 5.7 million refugees. UNRWA opponents are concerned that an ever-expanding refugee definition creates a stumbling block to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The right of return for refugees to sovereign Israel is one of the core topics that would be part of negotiations for a two-state resolution to the conflict.

UNRWA has also come under fire for using textbooks that allegedly incite against Israel and for inefficient use of resources.

Supporters of UNRWA have argued that the agency provides essential services that prevent a humanitarian crisis among Palestinians and its education system provides an alternative to extremist ideologies.

At the UN on Wednesday, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini took issue with these allegations, stating that it was important to defend the organization’s mandate as well as the rights of Palestinian refugees.

There are, he said, “growing defamatory campaigns” against UNRWA. “These nasty and incessant campaigns aim at harming UNRWA’s reputation, weakening its mandate and erasing the Palestinian refugee issue” and trying to strip “UNRWA from its funding base,” Lazzarini added.

“UNRWA strongly rejects these allegations. The agency has a zero tolerance policy for incitement to violence and discrimination.

Unemployment and poverty was already high prior to the pandemic, but now he said, he was “extremely alarmed” by the level of challenges facing Palestinian refugees.

“People are struggling daily to ensure one meal to their families, no one should feel so desperate,” he said.

“2021 will continue to be a challenging year,” Lazzarini said, but added he was hopeful that US funding would help alleviate some of that strain.