

Israel seeks destruction of Palestinian refugee agency and establishment of Jewish settlements in Gaza

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Israel responded to the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) ruling last Friday, requesting it to "take all measures within its power" to avoid acts of genocide, by redoubling its efforts to starve the Palestinians and planning for the repopulation of Gaza with Jewish settlements.

The same day that the ICJ's preliminary findings were issued, the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) said that Israel had provided the organisation with information alleging that 12 of its employees had taken part in the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led incursion and participated in massacres.

One was accused of kidnapping a woman, another of handing out ammunition and a third of taking part in the massacre at a kibbutz where 97 people died. Seven were said to be teachers at UNRWA schools and two worked at the schools in other capacities.

Israel initially said that its "information" on the 12 was the result of its interrogation, i.e. torture, of captured "militants". It then changed its story, stating that intelligence services had monitored their cell phones.

The move was a carefully planned counterblast to the ICJ.

Israel had in fact handed its information to UNRWA Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini last Sunday, January 21. He flew to New York for discussions with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres before informing donors midweek and then making his announcement on Friday just as the ICJ was delivering its verdict.

UNRWA announced it would fire the employees in question and refer them for criminal investigation. Nine were fired and two are reported dead.

In sharp contrast to the months of polite appeals for Israel to abide by international law while it has murdered 30,000 Palestinians and reduced Gaza to rubble, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken immediately suspended funds to UNRWA. This was followed in quick succession by the UK, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Romania, Finland, Canada, Australia and Switzerland. The European

Union called on UNRWA to investigate all its staff to "confirm that they did not participate in the attacks."

Israel's accusations and attempts to permanently delegitimise UNRWA have escalated since then. The *Wall Street Journal* and the *Jerusalem Post* reported that Israel had presented American officials with intelligence estimates that around 1,200 of the 12,000 people UNRWA employs in Gaza (other estimates of UNRWA's employees range up to 30,000) "have links to Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad, enough to warrant the suspension of funding to UNRWA. And about half have close relatives who belong to the Islamist militant groups."

A senior Israeli government official commented, "UNRWA's problem is not just 'a few bad apples' involved in the October 7th massacre... The institution as a whole is a haven for Hamas radical ideology."

This is the answer of Israel and its backers to the meaningless appeal by the ICJ for it to "take immediate and effective measures immediately to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance".

UNRWA handles most of the humanitarian aid to 2 million displaced people in Gaza, part of its providing of services to six million men, women and children in 58 refugee camps spread over Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and East Jerusalem and Gaza.

Lazzarini pleaded, "I am shocked such decisions are taken based on alleged behaviour of a few individuals and as the war continues, needs are deepening and famine looms."

A US statement accepted that "UNRWA plays a critical role in providing lifesaving assistance to Palestinians, including essential food, medicine, shelter, and other vital humanitarian support," and that "Their work has saved lives." This only confirms that the imperialist powers are working with Israel to starve the Palestinians, kill thousands more and force them into exile.

The destruction of UNRWA is a declared goal of Israel

and enjoyed the full support of the Trump administration before now being adopted also by Biden. During the Gaza conflict, there have been hundreds of attacks on its facilities, with over 150 UNRWA staff killed and hundreds more civilians sheltering in its facilities.

In December, a classified Israeli foreign ministry report was leaked proposing the elimination of UNRWA from Gaza in three steps. The plan began with alleging cooperation of UNRWA staff members with Hamas, followed by a reduction of UNRWA services in Gaza and then the transfer of its duties to whatever entity was left governing Gaza after the end of the war—in effect giving Israel a chokehold on the supply of all essentials to the Palestinians.

Government officials could not hide their glee. Foreign Minister Israel Katz, who earlier declared that his aims include “promoting a policy ensuring that UNRWA will not be a part of the day after”, wrote on Twitter/X, “We have been warning for years: UNRWA perpetuates the refugee issue, obstructs peace, and serves as a civilian arm of Hamas in Gaza.”

Ending UNRWA’s “perpetuating the refugee issue” effectively means ending its ability to stop Israel from killing them.

The second stage of Israel’s strategy is to replace the Palestinians starved and bombed out of Gaza. These plans were discussed at a “Victory of Israel Conference” of fascists on Sunday, subtitled “Settlement Brings Security”.

Organised by the Nachala settler activist group, the event presented maps of six proposed Jewish settlements inside the Gaza Strip, including deep within (the remains of) Gaza City and Khan Younis.

Chairwoman Daniella Weiss declared, “Millions of war refugees go from country to country around the world,” asking rhetorically why “only the monsters who grew in Gaza... only they should be connected to it? They, specifically, can’t move from a land they turned into hell and from where they threaten to destroy Israel?”

“Only the people of Israel will settle the entire Gaza Strip and will rule the entire Gaza Strip.”

Reporters described a “carnival-like atmosphere”, with many of the roughly 1,000 participants, some of them visibly armed, literally dancing for joy amid speeches from the likes of Uzi Sharbag, former leader of the far-right terror group Jewish Underground.

Among them were 11 cabinet ministers, including five members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party, three members of Jewish Power, two members of Religious Zionism and one of United Torah Judaism. Fifteen more non-cabinet members of the Israeli parliament also participated.

Six of them, plus Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, signed a Covenant of Victory and Renewal of Settlement pledging to “grow Jewish settlements full of life” in Gaza.

Smotrich told the conference, “Without settlement, there is no security. And without security on Israel’s borders, there is no security in any part of Israel... God willing, together we will be victorious.”

Ben Gvir denounced the abandonment of Israeli settlements in Gaza in 2005 as a “mistake” and part of “the sin of the conception that brought upon us October 7.” calling for a return “to Gush Katif [an evacuated Israeli settlement in the Strip]”. Making clear that the genocide in Gaza is conceived of as only the first stage of a war of annihilation against the Palestinians everywhere, he also referenced “Samaria”, the name used by the Israeli right to refer to the West Bank.

The fascist minister demanded a “moral and logical solution to the humanitarian problem [the Palestinians still living in Gaza]: encourage emigration and [pass a] death penalty law [for terror convicts].”

Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud argued similarly, “We have an obligation to act, for our sakes and even for the sake of those purported uninvolved civilians, to [bring about] voluntary emigration—even if this war, which was imposed on us, turns this voluntary migration into a situation of: coerce him until he says, ‘I want to do so’.”

In an implicit appeal to Netanyahu, Ben Gvir declared in his speech that it was “the task of brave leadership to take brave decisions.”

Netanyahu did not attend the conference but indicated his agreement without openly stating it, saying that his ministers were “entitled to their opinions”.



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