

# Australian Labor government helping to starve Gaza

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13 March 2024

Amid reports that civilians in Gaza are starving to death for lack of food, the Australian Labor government is one of a relative handful maintaining a freeze on funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Given that UNRWA is the primary international agency delivering and administering aid to besieged Gaza, the freeze means the Labor government is directly aiding Israel's use of starvation as a weapon of war.

The Australian finances tied up by the freeze are minimal, reflecting the contempt of the government for the Palestinians of Gaza, whose bombardment by Israel it has supported.

According to government statements, an "emergency" aid grant of just \$6 million is all that is frozen. That was part of a pitiful pledge made by Foreign Minister Penny Wong last January, during a tour to Israel in which she fawned over architects of the genocide, such as President Isaac Herzog, while cynically presenting her trip as a "humanitarian" effort. The \$6 million is a "top up" on an annual commitment of only \$20 million.

Beyond the direct consequences of the limited funding being withheld, the Labor government is once again marching in lockstep with the US administration of Joe Biden, which is financing and overseeing the genocide. Australia is lending legitimacy to the US and Israeli orchestrated UNRWA freeze, under conditions where the pretexts used to justify the withholding of aid have been exposed as Zionist concoctions.

Over the past week, both Canada and Sweden have announced they will resume funding to UNRWA. Asked on Monday whether Australia would follow suit, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese avoided a direct answer, but made clear enough that the freeze would not be lifted.

As has become his speciality, Albanese shed crocodile tears, while maintaining his government's full alignment

with Israel. The government, he said, was "giving consideration to the range of support that can be given, including through other forms as well, in terms of essential food and lifesaving delivery there."

What that consists of, Albanese did not say, but his remarks were similar to those of Biden officials. To cover over their complicity in the starvation policy, the US has carried out a handful of food aid drops and announced plans for the construction of a pier off Gaza, while holding the line on the UNRWA freeze.

It was left to Assistant Defence Minister Matt Thistlethwaite to spell out the Labor government's real line. As cited in the *Australian Financial Review*, Thistlethwaite indicated that "the government would wait until the investigation had finished before making any decision about restoring aid."

He declared: "Australia cannot be involved in funding organisations that have members involved in terrorist activity. So, there's an investigation going on into that and we'll make a decision once that investigation is completed."

That was just a straight repetition of Israeli government propaganda. In January, when Israel first blared allegations that UNRWA employees had participated in the October 7 Hamas military action, the story was already threadbare. It rapidly emerged that the handful of individuals allegedly involved were not even necessarily UNRWA employees, but had at some point posted in UNRWA-related social media groupings that anyone could join.

Thistlethwaite's comments followed media stories about an UNRWA report prepared last month. It reportedly found that employees of the agency had been held under arduous conditions in Israel and had been bullied through threats and coercion into making false statements about UNRWA involvement in October 7. In other words, Israel had effectively tortured United

Nations employees to concoct propaganda lies.

That only confirmed the fraudulent character of the Israeli accusations. Suddenly aired months after October 7, they were a transparent response to a finding by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that Israel had a plausible case to answer that it was committing genocide in Gaza.

In addition to striking back against the United Nations, the hysterical allegations and demands for a funding freeze were in line with a longstanding Zionist hostility to UNRWA. Israeli leaders have for decades denounced UNRWA for helping to keep Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, rather than arranging for their refuge elsewhere and facilitating Zionist plans to openly seize those Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The Labor government dismissed the ICJ finding, with Wong and Albanese blandly declaring that they did not accept the “premise” of the South African case that Israel was committing genocide. They then immediately joined the US and other Israeli allies in imposing the UNRWA funding freeze.

In early February, after imposing the freeze, Wong admitted that there was no objective basis for the decision, other than the lurid Israeli accusations. The government, Wong acknowledged, was “not in full possession of the facts,” even as she declared the freeze would continue indefinitely.

The continuing attack on UNRWA is yet another exposure of the Labor government’s cynical efforts to distance itself from Israeli mass murder in Gaza. Throughout October, Labor leaders enthusiastically supported the bombardment, insisting that it was an expression of Israel’s “right to defend itself.” That line has persisted, but amid growing opposition, Labor leaders have shed cynical crocodile tears over the massive casualties.

Speaking at the *Australian Financial Review* Business Summit on Tuesday, Wong again put on a display of doublespeak. After October 7, Wong said, “the world was rightly very sympathetic to and consolidative with Israel at that time.” But she echoed Biden’s warning over the weekend that “unless Israel changes its course, it will continue to lose support.” The world was “horrified at the current situation, the loss of innocent civilian life and the scale of the humanitarian crisis.”

But, Wong reminded the audience that Australia was part of the US-led Five Eyes alliance, which was and remained “supportive of the existence of the State of Israel.”

Biden’s expressions of concern over the mass death in Gaza come as his administration continues to supply the bombs inflicting the carnage. Australia, as a middle order imperialist power, is also playing a direct role.

In November, *Declassified Australia* reported that the joint US-Australian Pine Gap military facility was being used to target Israeli strikes on Gaza. The Department of Defence and the government have refused to comment.

Australia has also directly aided US-led strikes in Yemen, in response to attempts by Houthi rebels to block military supplies passing through the Red Sea to Israel. And the Albanese government has backed the US attempts to escalate the genocide into a broader conflict targeting Iranian-linked forces throughout the region, hailing American bombing operations in Iraq and Syria.

Over recent days, another disturbing expression of Australian complicity has been reported in the press. Desperate Palestinians, who fled Gaza after being granted permission to travel to Australia, have reported their visas suddenly being canceled. Those affected had already paid large sums to travel to Australia, and are now stranded, unable to return to Gaza and allowed to stay in neighboring countries such as Egypt only for a short period.

For all its attempted evasions, the Labor government is a party to the worst war crimes of the past eighty years. This month, a group of lawyers referred the Albanese government to the International Criminal Court, calling for an investigation into its complicity in genocide. As the lawyers stated: “Australia has supplied Israel with military equipment, intelligence data, and significant and ongoing political support.”



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