

TURN-KEY ALTERNATIVES TO REPLACE UNRWA IMMEDIATELY

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INTRODUCTION

The October 7 Hamas massacre validated past congressional attempts to overhaul or replace the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Unfortunately, it took the worst pogrom since the Holocaust to shine a light on how UNRWA keeps Palestinians trapped in phony refugee status, incites violence through antisemitic textbooks and anti-Israel propaganda, allows Hamas to use its facilities to plan and launch terror attacks, and diverts aid to terrorists and their activities.¹

UNRWA today is waging an information war to save itself — activating UN officials and pro-Palestinian networks to argue that UNRWA is irreplaceable. The recent report from the UN secretary-general’s sham investigative committee is a clear intent to whitewash UNRWA’s crimes and give political cover to donor nations to resume contributions. That cannot be allowed to happen.

Congress recently prohibited direct aid to UNRWA through March 2025 — a ban that should be made permanent. Action must now be taken to pressure other donors to halt their contributions as well — a campaign that will not succeed until we dispel the false claim that UNRWA is essential. It is not.

October 7 exposed UNRWA as an irredeemable collaborator with designated foreign terrorist organizations. Some UNRWA staff members participated in the attacks. Others stole the corpses of murdered Israelis, and still others held hostages in their homes.² The vast majority³ are either members of or have family members belonging to terrorist groups.⁴ Hamas built tunnels — using aid funded by American taxpayers — under UNRWA schools and

1. David Luhnow and Carrie Keller-Lynn, “A U.N. Agency Is Accused of Links to Hamas. The Clues Were There All Along,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 2, 2024. (<https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/hamas-israel-attack-united-nations-unrwa-0ec8d325>)

2. Dina Rovner, Luis Pelaez, Daniel Smith, and Hillel Neuer, “UNRWA’S Terrorgram: How a Telegram Group of 3,000 UNRWA Teachers in Gaza Celebrated the October 7th Hamas Massacre,” *UN Watch*, January 2024. (<https://unwatch.org/unrwa-terrorgram>)

3. Peter Anthony Gallo, “The Sham Investigation of UNRWA,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 2024. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-sham-investigation-of-unrwa-whitewashing-terrorist-ties-could-rehire-offenders-3c428f32>); Jeremy Sharon, “UNRWA critics deeply skeptical as review panel set to present final recommendations,” *The Times of Israel* (Israel), April 21, 2024. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/unrwa-critics-deeply-skeptical-as-review-panel-set-to-present-final-recommendations>)

4. Richard Goldberg, “UNRWA Exposed: Examining the Agency’s Mission and Failures,” *Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittees on Oversight and Accountability and Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations*, January 30, 2024. (<https://www.congress.gov/118/meeting/house/116769/witnesses/HMTG-118-FA17-Wstate-GoldbergR-20240130.pdf>)

institutions.⁵ This could not have happened without the knowledge and even complicity of UNRWA's leadership over many years.

The UN General Assembly today is unlikely to vote to change or dissolve UNRWA's mandate. The priority now must be to defund the agency and isolate it from any work or responsibility. Yet absent a concrete roadmap to move away from UNRWA, donors will restore funding out of the misplaced concern that no other alternative exists. This is a myth established by UNRWA itself.

In reality, the United Nations provides relevant aid directly to more than 90 million people across 83 countries. Such services could supplant UNRWA.⁶ This memo describes what services UNRWA provides, identifies turn-key alternatives, and suggests individualized solutions for other areas where UNRWA operates, including Jordan and Lebanon.

WHAT DOES UNRWA ACTUALLY DO?

Based on public statements and press reports, UNRWA claims to provide for every possible basic need of Palestinians living in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.⁷ In reality, no single agency could provide everything needed in areas where refugee relief, internally displacement person (IDP) assistance, poverty alleviation, or economic development are all required. While there is often a lead coordinating agency, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration, or UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United States and other leading foreign aid donors fund an alphabet soup of UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to perform expert and specific functions.⁸

For political reasons rather than need-based reasons, UNRWA is in charge of education, healthcare, protection, social services, microfinance, infrastructure, and emergency response in the areas where it operates.⁹ All of these services are listed on its website.

But these are core functions that governments should perform. Jordan, for example, where UNRWA claims to serve 2 million refugees, has education, healthcare, social service, and infrastructure systems already in place.¹⁰ So does the Palestinian Authority.¹¹ And so, too, should a future technocratic government running Gaza.

When considering what Gaza should look like once Hamas is defeated and every hostage is released, the first priority should be establishing local governments led by Palestinians with no affiliation to Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, or any other terrorist organization. Donors might assist in funding technical training for a civil service to absorb services for which UNRWA was responsible.

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5. Kyle Morris, "US Taxpayers have funded UNRWA billions of dollars amid calls for its scrapping: 'horror show,'" *Fox News*, February 1, 2024. (<https://www.foxnews.com/world/us-taxpayers-have-funded-unrwa-billions-dollars-amid-calls-scrapping-horror-show>)

6. "Explainer: How UN delivers lifesaving aid amid crises," UN News, October 12, 2023. (<https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142262#:~:text=Here%20are%20some%20fast%20facts,3%20million%20lives%20every%20year.>)

7. "Palestine Refugees," *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*, accessed April 11, 2024. (<https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>)

8. John W. McArthur and Krista Rasmussen, "Who Funds Which Multilateral Organizations?" *The Brookings Institution*, December 2017. (https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/globalviews_who_funds_which_multilaterals.pdf)

9. "What we do," *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*, accessed April 11, 2024. (<https://www.unrwa.org/what-we-do>)

10. Kamel S. Abu Jaber and Ian J. Bickerton, "Jordan - Monarchy, Constitution, Parliament," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed April 11, 2024. (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Jordan/Security>)

11. "Palestinian Authority," *Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics*, accessed April 11, 2024. (https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang_en/628/default.aspx)

Several UN agencies and NGOs, of course, can support these functions, and they can provide a bridge toward this transition — a transition that must be coordinated with Israel.

THE INTERNATIONAL TRUST FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF GAZA

A recent report by the Vandenberg Coalition and the Jewish Institute for National Security of America concluded that the way forward to transition Gaza to a non-Hamas, technocratic, and self-sufficient governance model is through an international trust funded by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, the United States, and key U.S. allies that are aligned in preventing the re-emergence of Hamas in Gaza.¹² This trust would serve as a pass-through for donors providing aid, services, and training needed to transition Gaza toward stabilization as quickly as possible. In adopting a mixed model for the coordination of assistance, this trust would empower the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to partner with OCHA to assign roles, subcontract aid delivery, and monitor the transition away from UNRWA.

UNICEF: EDUCATION AND PROTECTION

The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) already provides education services for hundreds of millions of out-of-school children around the world.¹³ The agency operates in 190 countries and territories, including Gaza.¹⁴ In Gaza, UNRWA schools should become local Gaza schools, and UNICEF has the expertise to support this transition. In the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, children should also attend local schools. UNICEF, in coordination with the USAID should be responsible for education solutions for Palestinians. UNICEF’s work should be time-limited, with the aim of rapidly transitioning responsibilities to a civil service-led local authority. UNICEF also plays an important role in healthcare and other protection for children¹⁵ — another role the agency can immediately take over from UNRWA.

Additionally, as revealed in research produced by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education, the textbooks used in UNRWA schools are specifically designed to 1) enshrine permanent refugee status on grade-school children, 2) incite Palestinian children to violence against Israelis and Jews in order to become martyrs, and 3) buck the trend seen in schoolbooks in other Arab countries, which have gone so far as to teach Holocaust education to Arab children.¹⁶ Palestinian children should not be taught the maximalist slogan “From the River to the Sea” as fact, nor should they learn to read maps that do not show the existence of the State of Israel. UNRWA has not addressed this problematic curriculum despite decades of pressure from donors.¹⁷ A transition away from UNRWA’s services presents an opportunity to finally adopt a set of teaching standards conducive to peace. The international trust of donor countries discussed above could work in coordination with UNICEF to turn this longstanding priority into action.

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12. John Hannah, Elliott Abrams, Rob Danin, Ambassador Eric Edelman, Gary Ginsberg, Emily Harding, Lewis Libby, and Steven Price, “The Day After: A Plan for Gaza,” *The Jewish Institute for National Security of America* and *The Vandenberg Coalition*, February 28, 2024. (<https://jinsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Gaza-Futures-Task-Force-Report.pdf>)

13. “27 million children out of school in conflict zones,” *United Nations Children’s Fund*, September 18, 2017. (<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/27-million-children-out-school-conflict-zones>)

14. “Where UNICEF Works,” *UNICEF USA*, accessed April 11, 2024. (<https://www.unicefusa.org/what-unicef-does/where-unicef-works>); “UNICEF in the State of Palestine Escalation of Humanitarian Situation Report No. 20,” *United Nations Children’s Fund*, March 2024. (<https://www.unicef.org/sop/reports/unicef-state-palestine-escalation-humanitarian-situation-report-no20>)

15. “Child Protection,” *United Nations Children’s Fund*, accessed April 11, 2024. (<https://www.unicef.org/child-protection>)

16. “Anatomy of an UNRWA School: An Evaluation of the Material Taught in Beit Hanoun UNRWA Schools,” *IMPACT-se*, March 2024. (https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/UNRWA-Beit-Hanoun-Schools_18.1-Final.pdf)

17. “UNRWA continued teaching hate after claiming it dropped content,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), February 18, 2021. (<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/unrwa-continued-teaching-hate-after-claiming-it-dropped-content-659345>)

WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

From Sudan to Syria to Yemen, from Nigeria to Haiti, the World Food Programme (WFP) has decades of experience delivering food and other humanitarian supplies in conflict zones.¹⁸ That is why the WFP is on the ground right now in Gaza facilitating the delivery of aid trucks to people in need.

As the transition to post-war Gaza begins, USAID can help advise a new technocratic government on ways to strengthen capacity to address food systems, nutrition, school-based programs, and more. USAID can also coordinate with the Israeli government to coordinate training in Gaza on sustainable agriculture so that in the future Gazans do not need to depend on international relief for food.

A WFP assistance regimen should not be a permanent dole. The WFP is not designed to offer never-ending assistance. As with UNICEF, WFP's services should temporarily bridge the gap toward self-reliance.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Like UNRWA, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been exposed over the last several months as a potential accomplice in helping Hamas conceal its terror headquarters inside hospitals and schools.¹⁹ The WHO has also been a leading voice in echoing Hamas propaganda and pressuring Israel to halt its operations against the terror organization.²⁰ Empowering this agency to have a major role in post-war Gaza requires strict conditions and the completion of an independent investigation into what WHO officials knew about Hamas's terror infrastructure.

Still, the WHO brings expertise in advising healthcare systems and working with healthcare providers, both during conflict and in post-conflict transition.²¹ The agency would typically be the natural lead for coordinating on health issues. A robust discussion of costs and benefits is needed to assess confidence in whether the WHO can temporarily fill health-related roles currently performed by UNRWA until a local cadre is trained to do so.

USAID, DEVELOPMENT FINANCE CORPORATION, AND OTHERS

With respect to economic development, including microfinance programs, reconstruction assistance, and growth planning, USAID brings extensive experience in advising governments and working with implementing partners.²² USAID also has a mechanism for vetting potential partners to ensure that there are no ties to known terrorist organizations. The vetting in the early post-Hamas period will certainly be time-consuming, but it is invaluable if American taxpayers are being asked to foot the bill for any part of Gaza reconstruction.

The UN's International Labour Organization is already studying the economic recovery needs in Gaza and would likely work with other partners.²³ At the same time, the World Bank has already conducted preliminary assessments of reconstruction costs, and it has experience stepping into areas like post-war Gaza to provide financing and

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18. "Where WFP Works," World Food Program USA, accessed April 11, 2024. (<https://www.wfpusa.org/where-we-work>)

19. "Israel says WHO colluding with Hamas by Ignoring Terrorist Use of Gaza Hospitals," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), January 26, 2024. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-says-who-colluding-with-hamas-by-ignoring-terrorist-use-of-gaza-hospitals>)

20. "U.S. Abandons Israel at the World Health Organization," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, December 13, 2023. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/12/13/u-s-abandons-israel-at-the-world-health-organization>)

21. Joyce H. Smith, "Guide to Health Workforce Development in Post-Conflict Environments," *World Health Organization*, 2005. (https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/publications/guide-to-health-workforce-development.pdf?sfvrsn=befcd0ab_1)

22. "What we do," *U.S. Agency for International Development*, accessed April 9, 2024. (<https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do>)

23. "Report on crisis-related ILO work in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," *International Labour Organization*, March 5, 2024. (https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_914521.pdf)

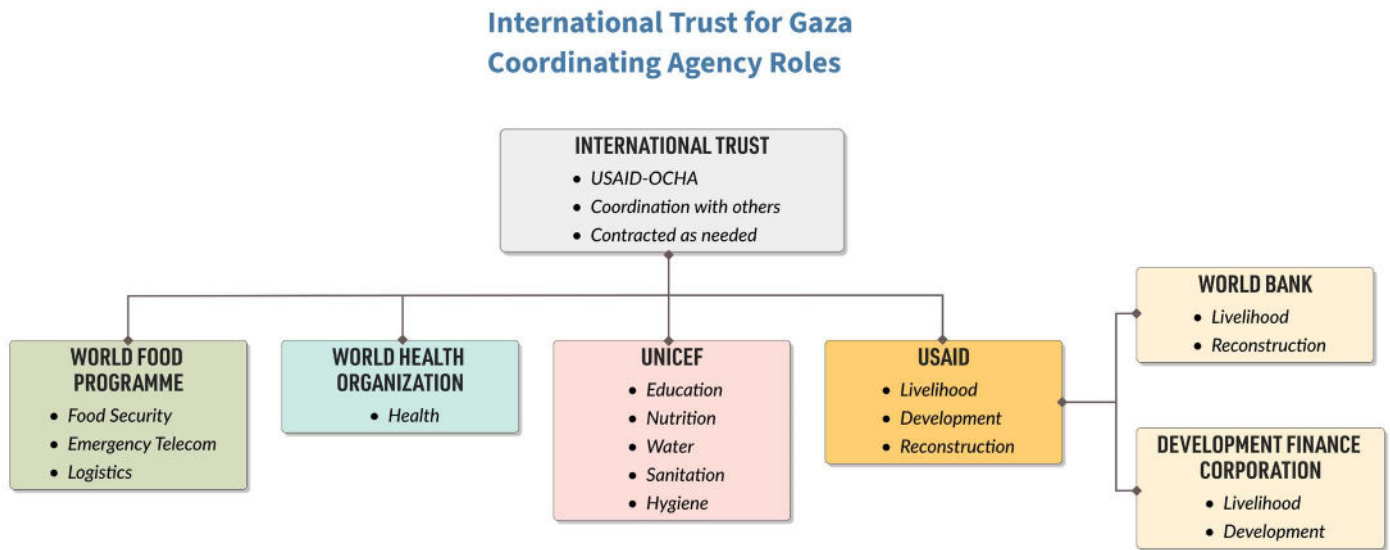
technical assistance in rebuilding and promoting economic growth.²⁴ This, however, requires U.S. vigilance to block Iranian, Qatari, Chinese, or Russian firms from receiving contracts. As an alternative to the World Bank, the United States could explore financing projects through the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) instead.

AN ALTERNATIVE TO UNRWA EXISTS — IT JUST NEEDS TO BE DIRECTED

Following October 7 and the mountain of evidence of UNRWA’s collaboration with Hamas, there is no going back to the status quo. Alternatives to the failed UNRWA model exist and should be supported immediately.

USAID, working with OCHA or another organization with a Middle East presence, could coordinate shelter, non-food items, and livelihood issues (the latter directly through USAID, DFC, and/or the World Bank); food security, emergency telecommunications, and logistics through the WFP; healthcare through the WHO; nutrition through UNICEF; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) through UNICEF; and education through UNICEF, ensuring appropriate textbooks and teaching materials.

FIGURE 1: TURNING THE PAGE FROM UNRWA



The new system must not swap one deeply flawed and corrupted welfare system for another. The goal should be to transition to self-sufficiency within five years or less. Mandates should be time-bound to hold to transition goalposts. Counterterrorism vetting must be stringent. Boxing out bad actors such as Qatar, Turkey, Iran, Russia, and China must be a condition for U.S. assistance.

For countries such as Jordan, where the United States already provides bilateral economic assistance, a transition away from UNRWA would be quite simple. To the extent necessary and through direct bilateral negotiation, the proportion of U.S. assistance that goes to UNRWA in Jordan can become additional economic assistance for Amman. No new funding would be needed.

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 24. The World Bank, Press Release, “World Bank Support for Emergency Relief to Gaza,” December 12, 2023. (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/12/12/world-bank-support-for-emergency-relief-to-gaza>)

In the West Bank, a transition from UNRWA is a necessary step to empower the kind of institution building that the Biden administration and moderate Arab governments have long endeavored to support. However, the United States and Israel will need to work closely to vet partners and prevent terror financing.

In Syria, UNRWA admits that most of the country's registered population has been displaced at least once by the civil war.²⁵ Many have left the country entirely. The International Organization for Migration is already on the ground in Syria providing the same services to even more people than UNRWA — making it an obvious choice for a smooth transition.²⁶

In 2018, one former Israeli official estimated that fewer than 250,000 Palestinians lived in Lebanon and Syria combined. It is quite reasonable for another organization to take over UNRWA's responsibilities in those countries.²⁷ But Lebanon also poses other challenges due to the government's longstanding discrimination against Palestinians as well as the presence of armed groups actively fighting each other in the country's largest UNRWA camp.²⁸ Pressure will be needed on Lebanon — a recipient of U.S. foreign assistance — to restore security, help Palestinians integrate into society, and work with other partners on the post-UNRWA transition.

CONCLUSION

The reality on the ground in Gaza is already shifting away from an UNRWA-centric aid model to a post-UNRWA alternative. UNRWA's supporters are working hard to lobby countries to resume aid, and they are relying on the UN secretary-general to halt the entry of other agencies. However, if the United States remains firm on permanently prohibiting aid to UNRWA and brings in key allies and partners along with a credible plan for an alternative structure that makes UNRWA irrelevant while improving life for Palestinians, it can achieve a new paradigm in Gaza that excludes UNRWA (and thus its Hamas partner). Implementation can begin immediately in Gaza to demonstrate proof of concept while steps are taken to prepare and implement transitions in other areas of UNRWA responsibility. In the end, even if the UN General Assembly maintains UNRWA's mandate, the agency will be a shell of itself — unable to harm Palestinians or Israelis any longer.

25. "Where We Work – Syria," *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*, accessed April 18, 2024. (<https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/syria>)

26. "Syria Response Plan," *International Organization for Migration*, accessed April 18, 2024. (https://syria.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11151/files/documents/2022_syrian_arab_republic_crisis_response_plan_2022_0.pdf)

27. "Former MK: UNRWA Inflated Number of Syrian and Lebanese Refugees by Factor of At Least Four," *The Tower*, September 4, 2018. (<https://www.thetower.org/6619-former-israeli-labor-mk-unrwa-inflated-number-of-refugees-by-a-factor-of-at-least-four>)

28. Bassam Tawil, "Palestinians: Victims of Apartheid," *Gatestone Institute*, July 17, 2023. (<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/19807/palestinians-apartheid-lebanon>); Abby Sewell and Fadi Tawil, "Clashes resume between factions in Lebanon's largest Palestinian refugee camp," *Associated Press*, September 8, 2023. (<https://apnews.com/article/ein-hilweh-palestinian-camp-clashes-lebanon-b2f6c398d83d26b97b6a4371eb4346ee>)

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