



**New York**

**05 February 2024**

## **Statement by the Secretary-General – on UNRWA**

**António Guterres, Secretary-General**

The Secretary-General, in consultation with UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini, has appointed an independent Review Group to assess whether the Agency is doing everything within its power to ensure neutrality and to respond to allegations of serious breaches when they are made.

The review will be led by Catherine Colonna, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, who will work with three research organizations: the Raoul Wallenberg Institute in Sweden, the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Norway, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

The Review Group will begin its work on 14 February 2024 and is expected to submit an interim report to the Secretary-General late March 2024, with a final report expected to be completed by late April 2024. The final report will be made public.

This review is in response to a request made by UNRWA Commissioner-General Lazzarini earlier this year.

The Review Group's terms of reference are:

- a. To identify the mechanisms and procedures that the Agency currently has in place to ensure neutrality and to respond to allegations or information indicating that the principle may have been breached;
- b. To ascertain how those mechanisms and procedures have, or have not, been implemented in practice and whether every practicable effort has been made to apply them to their full potential, taking into account the particular operational, political and security environment in which the Agency works;
- c. To assess the adequacy of those mechanisms and procedures and whether they are fit for purpose, including in relation to the management of risks and taking into account the particular operational, political and security context in which the Agency works;
- d. To make recommendations for the improvement and strengthening, if necessary, of the mechanisms and procedures that are currently in place or for the creation of new and alternative mechanisms and procedures that would be better fit for purpose, taking into account the particular operational, political and security context in which the Agency works;

The Secretary-General notes that these accusations come at a time when UNRWA, the largest UN organization in the region, is working under extremely challenging conditions to deliver life-saving assistance to the 2 million people in the Gaza Strip who depend on it for their survival amidst one of the largest and most complex humanitarian crises in the world.

This independent external review will take place in parallel with an investigation currently underway by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) into allegations of the involvement of 12 UNRWA personnel in the 7 October attacks. The cooperation of the Israeli authorities, who made these allegations, will be critical to the success of the investigation.

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