

STATEMENT OF PHILIPPE LAZZARINI, COMMISSIONER-GENERAL OF UNRWA, AT THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

09 October 2024

[NEW YORK \(via video link\)](#)

Madame la Présidente,

Excellencies,

I deeply regret that one year after the abhorrent attacks against Israel, and the catastrophic war on Gaza, no end is in sight to the brutal violence engulfing the region.

It has been a year of profound loss and suffering.

A year of dehumanization and barbarism.

Hostages taken from Israel remain captive, their families left in deep and prolonged distress.

Gaza is unrecognizable.

A sea of rubble.

A graveyard for tens of thousands of people, including far too many children.

Almost the entire population is displaced.

People have been forced to flee multiple times, searching for safety that does not exist.

The latest developments in the north are especially alarming.

Hundreds of thousands of people are again being pushed to move to the south, where living conditions are intolerable.

And yet again, Gazans are teetering on the edge of a man-made famine.

Children in Gaza have not been spared.

They are killed, injured and orphaned in shocking numbers.

More than 650,000 children are out of school – deeply traumatized and living in the rubble.

They have already lost two years of learning.

Palestinians are no strangers to loss.

But to be dispossessed from education – which has always been a source of pride – is new.

We cannot afford to lose an entire generation and sow the seeds for future hatred and extremism.

That is why UNRWA, beyond its lifesaving operations, has resumed some learning activities in Gaza.

Every day, we provide psychosocial services to thousands of children.

We build on these activities to help them read, write, and do some basic arithmetic.

Bringing children back to learning should be a collective and urgent priority.

UNRWA has also played a critical role in an emergency vaccination campaign against polio, which has returned to Gaza, 25 years after eradication.

Together with WHO and UNICEF, UNRWA vaccinated more than half a million children during short pauses in military activities.

The second round of the campaign is planned for mid-October.

We hope to succeed again.

For this we need sufficient political will.

Madame President,

Beyond Gaza, **the West Bank** is gripped by escalating violence.

Nearly **700** people have been killed in the past year. Among them, more than **160** children.

Civilian life is increasingly militarized, and settlement activity is expanding aggressively.

The Israeli Security Forces routinely destroy public infrastructure during military operations, inflicting collective punishment on Palestinians.

Lebanon is the latest casualty of this widening conflict.

Civilians are paying a heavy price.

Air strikes by Israeli forces are killing and injuring thousands, and displacing hundreds of thousands, while Hezbollah continues to attack Israel with rockets.

UNRWA has opened **11** shelters in Lebanon, hosting **more than 4,500** Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian displaced persons.

The need for the Agency's services in Gaza, the occupied West Bank, and Lebanon has never been greater.

And we have never been under fiercer attack.

Excellencies,

The blatant disregard for international humanitarian law, and a near total breakdown of civil order, is crippling the humanitarian response in Gaza.

Gaza is the most dangerous place in the world for aid workers – **226** UNRWA personnel have been killed in 12 months.

United Nations premises, including two-thirds of UNRWA's buildings, have been damaged or destroyed.

Our premises have also been used for military purposes by Palestinian armed groups, including Hamas, and the Israeli Security Forces.

Humanitarian aid convoys are looted by armed gangs and obstructed by Israeli soldiers defying their own chain of command.

Without a lasting ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of hostages, and unfettered humanitarian access, the aid operation will collapse, plunging two million people into chaos.

In the broader occupied Palestinian territory, the Agency's operational space is shrinking.

Senior Israeli officials have described destroying UNRWA as a war goal.

Legislation to end our operations is ready for final adoption by the Israeli Knesset.

It seeks to ban UNRWA's presence and operations in the territory of Israel, revoking its privileges and immunities, in violation of international law.

If the bills are adopted, the consequences will be severe.

Operationally, the entire humanitarian response in Gaza – which rests on UNRWA's infrastructure – may disintegrate.

Coordination with Israel would cease, further disrupting the provision of shelter, food, and healthcare to people in desperate need as winter approaches.

More than 650,000 children would lose any hope of resuming their education and an entire generation would be sacrificed.

In the West Bank, the delivery of education, primary healthcare and emergency aid to hundreds of thousands of Palestine Refugees would grind to a halt.

Legally, the Knesset legislation violates Israel's obligations under the United Nations Charter and international law.

It defies the will of the international community expressed through General Assembly resolution 302 on UNRWA, and deepens violations recognized by the International Court of Justice.

Politically, the anti-UNRWA legislation, which is part of a broader campaign to dismantle the Agency, seeks to strip Palestinians from their refugee status, and change – unilaterally – the parameters for a future political solution.

Madam President,

These attacks set a grave precedent for other conflict situations where governments may wish to eliminate an inconvenient United Nations presence.

They target not just UNRWA, but any individual or entity calling for compliance with international law and a peaceful political solution.

Failing to push back against attempts to intimidate and undermine the United Nations in the occupied Palestinian territory will eventually compromise humanitarian and human rights work worldwide.

This Council must decide to which extent it will tolerate acts that strike at the heart of multilateralism and compromise international peace and security.

The climate of impunity that prevails will not dissipate without decisive action.

We can uphold the UN Charter and enforce international law, including the Geneva Conventions and the decisions of international courts, without exception.

Or we can concede that the post-World War II rules-based international order is at an end.

The devastation of the past year should pull us back from the brink of creating dangerous new norms of warfare and reneging on our decades-long commitment to Palestine Refugees.

UNRWA is an integral part of the United Nations, which anchors the multilateral system.

I urge you to shield this UN agency from efforts to end its mandate, arbitrarily and prematurely, in the absence of a long-promised political solution.

Thank you.