

## **Statement Issued by the Palestinian Civil Society of the Refugee Camps in Lebanon**

Palestinian civil foundations are closely monitoring the repercussions of the ongoing campaign to eliminate the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

In an unprecedented development, the Western countries, headed by Washington, adopted a decision to cut UNRWA's funding as a punitive measure against Palestinian refugees, under the pretext of the involvement of 12 employees of the Agency in operation al-Aqsa flood, launched on October 7.

The imperialist-driven campaign attempts to pressure Palestinians to make political concessions related to their basic rights, which include ending the occupation, the right to self-determination and the right of return.

Such plots against UNRWA have been preceded by similar steps, on different occasions. In 2018, former US President, Donald Trump, ordered the suspension of \$300 million worth of funding to UNRWA, in the context of an American-Zionist understanding to resolve the permanent status issues and liquidate the Palestinian cause.

This irresponsible and unprecedented step is an extension of genocidal rhetoric and action, which not only condemns Palestinians to death, but punishes people for trying to assist in the survival of genocide.

Since the genocidal attack in Gaza began, the Israeli occupation has murdered more than 30,000 people, most of whom are women and children, injured over 70,000 people and displaced more than 1.8 million people.

The atrocious war on Gaza has also resulted in wide-scale destruction, which has been compared to the destruction of German cities during World War II (according to Western resources, by December 5, the destruction of Gaza exceeded Cologne and Dresden, and was approaching the level of destruction that took place in Hamburg).

Adding to the war crimes, more than 2 million people are facing famine in Gaza strip as reported by international humanitarian organizations. Zionist atrocities are also being perpetrated across the West Bank, where incursions led by Zionist forces and terrorist acts by settlers have been increasingly in frequency and severity, Palestinians are being assaulted, assassinated, kidnapped, arrested and executed by Zionist soldiers and settlers.

The decision to establish UNRWA in 1949 came as a direct result of the Nakba of 1948, which led to the displacement of more than 800,000 Palestinians (today over 6 million) after the destruction of their cities and villages at the hands of Zionist gangs.

Since then, UNRWA has become the international agency responsible for providing basic humanitarian aid and services, such as food, health, and education, to Palestinian refugees.

Further to the aforementioned, the Palestinian civil society organisations are interested in emphasising the following:

1. Suspension of funding to UNRWA to end its presence is a blatant violation of international humanitarian laws and all norms and covenants that recognize the right of Palestinian refugees to access their basic human needs of food, shelter, education and health. It is a clear violation by Washington and its allies to their obligations, in accordance with the provisions of the Genocide Convention and the recent decision issued by the ICJ, which stipulate the necessity of providing urgent humanitarian services and aid as it is extremely necessary in order to prevent acts of genocide.

2. The aforementioned campaign is considered a collective punishment of the Palestinian people, especially the resilient residents of the Gaza Strip who are facing the darkest circumstances and are being subjected to murder, starvation, displacement and abuse in full view of the world.

3. Suspension of funding is an acquiescence by the international community, led by Washington and the above-mentioned countries, to Zionist dictates and direct involvement in the project of ethnic cleansing and the apartheid regime practiced by the occupation against the legitimate owners of the land. It is a violation of the provisions of the Genocide Convention and the principles of international law, which relates to the provision of urgent services and humanitarian aid, as the court emphasized that providing basic services and introducing humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip is extremely necessary in order to prevent acts of genocide.

4. We call on the concerned countries to immediately withdraw from these retaliatory policies and to put pressure on the occupation government to stop its aggression against our people in Gaza immediately, and to abide by UN laws and resolutions and international legitimacy that stipulate the end to the occupation and the return of refugees to their homes.

5. We call on the international community to adhere to its responsibilities towards UNRWA. It is an international witness to the catastrophe of the Palestinian people. It is necessary to preserve the institution so it can continue to provide its services and carry out its tasks until the implementation of UN Resolution 194, which stipulates the return of Palestinian refugees and compensates them for the damages they have sustained.

We call all sectors of our people, political and popular organisations, and all bodies and frameworks supporting the Palestinian cause, to prioritise this urgent issue and to take escalatory procedures to confront this hostile policy, if the concerned parties do not retract their position.

Palestinian civil society organisations in refugee camps in Lebanon

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