

MIDDLE EAST NETWORK

STATEMENT FROM THE MIDDLE EAST NETWORK IN RELATION TO ISRAEL'S DECISION TO BAN UNRWA.

THE MIDDLE EAST NETWORK IS APPALLED BY THE DECISION OF THE ISRAELI PARLIAMENT, THE KNESSET, TO BAN UNRWA FROM OPERATING IN ISRAEL. THE MIDDLE EAST NETWORK NOTES THAT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IN UN HISTORY THAT A MEMBER STATE HAS ARBITRARILY INTERFERED WITH THE MANDATE OF A UN ORGANISATION, AND THAT THE INTERVENTION COMES IN THE WAKE OF AN INDEPENDENT STUDY FROM 2024 THAT FINDS THAT UNRWA HAS **ROBUST MECHANISMS AND PROCEDURES IN PLACE TO ENSURE COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF HUMANITARIAN NEUTRALITY**[1].

ISRAEL'S BANNING OF UNRWA RAISES SERIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DECISION'S PROPORTIONALITY AND REINFORCES FEARS OF ETHNIC CLEANSING, AS THE DECISION IS A DIRECT ATTACK ON HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND UNRWA IS THE VERY SYMBOL THAT PALESTINIANS AS A PEOPLE HAVE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS ON AN EQUAL FOOTING WITH OTHER PEOPLES.

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNRWA

THE NETWORK REMINDS THAT:

- UNRWA IS FAR MORE THAN A HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION IN THE NARROW SENSE AND THAT UNRWA HAS PLAYED A CRUCIAL ROLE IN THE LIVES OF PALESTINIANS SINCE 1949, A FACT EMPHASIZED IN THE 2024 REPORT.
- UNRWA IS THE ONLY UN ORGANISATION WITH A SPECIFIC MANDATE TO SUPPORT PALESTINIAN REFUGEES. THIS MANDATE, GIVEN BY THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, IS DESIGNED TO ADDRESS THE UNIQUE AND COMPLEX NEEDS OF PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN TERMS OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, SOCIAL WELFARE AND EMERGENCY RELIEF. THE MANDATE WAS GIVEN WITH THE SUPPORT OF ISRAEL.
- UNRWA PROVIDES AN INFRASTRUCTURE THAT ENABLES ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND BASIC HEALTHCARE SERVICES FOR 1.9 MILLION PALESTINIANS IN GAZA AND 800,000 PALESTINIANS IN THE WEST BANK. IN ADDITION, UNRWA IS A CENTRAL LIFELINE FOR 170,000 PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON, 400,000 IN SYRIA AND 2 MILLION IN JORDAN.
- OTHER UN ORGANISATIONS SUCH AS UNICEF, WHO AND UNHCR WORK WITH BROADER GLOBAL MANDATES AND EACH FOCUS ON SPECIFIC SECTORS (HEALTH, EDUCATION, REPATRIATION) AND THEREFORE DO NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY AND EXPERTISE TO TAKE ON UNRWA'S MUCH BROADER MANDATE.

[1] [HTTPS://WWW.UNRWA.ORG/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/CONTENT/RESOURCES/UNRWA_INDEPENDENT_REVIEW_ON_NEUTRALITY.PDF](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_independent_review_on_neutrality.pdf)

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- UNRWA'S PRESENCE IN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES IS A STABILISING FACTOR. THE ORGANISATION IS ONE OF THE FEW INSTITUTIONS TRUSTED BY PALESTINIAN REFUGEES AND ITS ROOTS IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY PROVIDE AN INVALUABLE ABILITY TO WORK IN THE DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES THAT OTHER UN ORGANISATIONS WOULD STRUGGLE TO MATCH.

ISRAEL'S COMMITMENTS

THE NETWORK RECOGNIZES THAT:

- ACCORDING TO THE RULES OF WARFARE^[2], EVERY OCCUPYING POWER IS OBLIGED TO ENSURE THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATION AND TO PROTECT THE CIVILIAN POPULATION OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. THIS MEANS THAT ISRAEL IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING ADEQUATE HEALTH CONDITIONS, FOOD SUPPLY AND ACCESS TO NECESSARY FACILITIES SUCH AS WATER AND MEDICINE. SERVICES THAT UNRWA HAS LARGELY BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR AND FUNDED WITH THE HELP OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.
- ANY FORM OF COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT OF CIVILIAN POPULATIONS IS PROHIBITED UNDER THE CONVENTIONS TO WHICH ISRAEL IS A PARTY. RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS TO NECESSARY RESOURCES, BLOCKADES OR OTHER ACTIONS THAT AFFECT THE POPULATION'S ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES SUCH AS WATER, ELECTRICITY AND FOOD ARE CONSIDERED ILLEGAL COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT.

DENMARK'S COMMITMENTS

THE NETWORK REMINDS THAT:

- DENMARK HAS LEGAL OBLIGATIONS TO ENSURE THAT WE DO NOT DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY CONTRIBUTE TO OR SUPPORT OTHER COUNTRIES' VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW, INCLUDING THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS.
- THIS MEANS THAT DENMARK MUST NOT DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY SUPPORT ACTIONS THAT MAY LEAD TO VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATION IN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, AND ACTIVELY REFRAIN FROM CO-OPERATION THAT DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY SUPPORTS SUCH VIOLATIONS.

[2] GENEVE CONVENTIONS

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THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON PALESTINIANS

THE NETWORK ALSO EXPRESSES GREAT CONCERN ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF:

- PUBLIC DISCOURSE, MEDIA COVERAGE AND POLITICAL DEBATE ON PALESTINIAN RIGHTS LARGELY FOCUS ON SECURITY AND TERROR, AND ONLY TO A LESSER EXTENT ON THE LONG-STANDING VIOLATION OF PALESTINIANS' POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS. TERROR AND OPPRESSION ARE, FOR LONG STRETCHES, DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE, AND FIGHTING TERROR CANNOT BE DONE WITHOUT FIGHTING OPPRESSION.
- THE GENERAL SILENCE AMONG POLICY MAKERS CONTRIBUTES TO UNDERMINING FAITH IN AN INTERNATIONAL LEGAL SYSTEM - A SYSTEM THAT DENMARK AS A SMALL STATE IS ALSO COMPLETELY DEPENDENT ON.

CALL TO THE DANISH GOVERNMENT

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, WE ONCE AGAIN CALL ON THE DANISH GOVERNMENT TO:

- PROTEST THE DECISION TO CLOSE UNRWA AND MAINTAIN DANISH SUPPORT FOR UNRWA.
- INCREASE SUPPORT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS OPERATING IN AND GAZA AND THE WEST BANK, SO THAT PALESTINIANS CAN STILL GET THE HELP THEY ARE ENTITLED TO.

WE ALSO CALL ON DENMARK TO:

- AS A FUTURE MEMBER OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL, TO ACTIVELY WORK FOR UNHINDERED ACCESS FOR HUMANITARIAN AID TO GAZA IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE 4TH GENEVA CONVENTION OF 1948.
- AS A MEMBER OF THE EU, ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO ENSURE THAT THE EU'S CONTINUED TRADE AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL IS CONDITIONAL ON ISRAEL'S COMPLIANCE WITH ITS OBLIGATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW, AS EMPHASIZED IN THE TRADE AGREEMENT.
- AS A CO-SIGNATORY TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS CONVENTION, THE GENOCIDE CONVENTION AND THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS TO PREVENT THE DANISH STATE, THROUGH THE SALE OF ARMS DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY ENABLING THE KILLING OF PALESTINIAN OR ISRAELI CIVILIANS.

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FINALLY, WE CALL ON THE DANISH GOVERNMENT TO WORK TOWARDS A NEGOTIATED PEACE THAT INVOLVING ALL KEY ACTORS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF BOTH THE PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI PEOPLE.

THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEES WILL NOT DISAPPEAR BY CLOSING UNRWA, BUT BY FINDING A SOLUTION TO THE TRAGEDY IN THE MIDDLE EAST THAT HONOURS THE INVOLABLE RIGHTS OF ALL PEOPLES.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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YOU CAN READ MORE ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST NETWORK'S WORK AT

WWW.MELLEMOESTNETVAERKET.COM