



November 2, 2023

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer:

As the Senate is soon to consider an FY2024 emergency supplemental package for key national security priorities, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) provides these comments to correct significant misstatements found in a 31-October letter to you led by Senator Blackburn. We were surprised by the timing of the letter as Senator Blackburn's office only contacted UNRWA on 28-October seeking a personal briefing for the Senator. A briefing, we note, which has yet to occur.

The reality on the ground does not support the letter's contention that international humanitarian assistance will inevitably be diverted from those in need. As Secretary Blinken noted in his appearance before the Senate Appropriations Committee just this week; "Throughout this process, we have the ability and others have an ability, to track where the assistance is going. We're then able to do monitoring on the other end by contacting the recipients to make sure that its actually gotten to where it's supposed to go, and not been diverted."

UNRWA's infrastructure, combined with its deep experience operating in conflict situations has made the Agency the backbone of the United Nations (UN) humanitarian response in Gaza. Aid trucks entering Gaza at the Rafah Crossing are met by UNRWA trucks, the goods transhipped and delivered to UNRWA warehouses and from there delivered to those in need. UNRWA convoys and their routes are notified and de-conflicted in advance with the Israeli authorities.

Even prior to 7-October, UNRWA's footprint in Gaza was vast; 13,000 employees operating a food assistance network supporting 1.2 million refugees (operated in full cooperation with the Israeli authorities), a large school system, and an extensive primary healthcare network.

UNRWA has a stringent staff conduct framework in place to ensure that staff members do not affiliate themselves, and by extension, UNRWA, with any other groups. All UNRWA staff, Palestine refugees, and contractors, vendors, and non-state donors are screened against the Consolidated United Nations Security Council Sanctions List.

UNRWA does not, and will not, divert any humanitarian aid into the wrong hands. Donor support goes directly to those in need. The Blackburn letter's authors are seemingly unaware of the requirements of U.S. law, or any of the provisions of the [US-UNRWA Framework for Cooperation](#). UNRWA is required to take all possible measures to ensure funding provided by the United States does not provide assistance to, or otherwise support, terrorists or terrorist organizations. This includes reporting requirements on any aid diversions.

UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications Melissa Fleming recently [observed](#), "Once again, the fog of war is driving the spread of hate and lies online — resulting in dangerous errors with real-time, real-world consequences."

Regrettably, the Blackburn letter reflects that circumstance. There has been no diversion of UNRWA fuel and medicine to Hamas. As UNRWA's Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini explained during an [appearance](#) on 'Face the Nation,' a transfer of medicine and fuel from our headquarter in Gaza City was coordinated with the local staff of the World Health Organization and provided for use in local hospitals.

Despite the letter's assertion to the contrary, UNRWA devotes considerable time and resources to ensuring its educational curriculum reflects UN values and UNESCO best practices. UNRWA reviews all host country textbooks to ensure consistency with UN positions, educational appropriateness, and adherence to UNESCO standards. To address the identified issues, the Agency utilizes a Critical Thinking Approach (CTA) to empower teachers to address the specific identified issues of concern in a way consistent with UN values. UNRWA reports on its findings regarding textbooks through periodic donor briefs and the Agency works closely with the Department of State on these issues.

Senator Schumer, these events are an unspeakable tragedy. As Commissioner-General Lazzarini has stated, "Our empathy should apply to all. Palestinians, Israelis, Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The rules of war must be followed by all parties, at all times, in all places. Civilians must be protected, hostages released, and a genuine humanitarian response facilitated."

Last night, one of our fallen UNRWA colleagues included [Mai](#), a person who overcame physical disabilities to become a front-end developer at the UNRWA Information Technology Service Center. Since the horrific events of 7-October, UNRWA has already lost Mai and 71 other members of its staff to the conflict. Despite this, thousands of UNRWA staff, many of whom are now displaced themselves, are still on the job assisting the 690,000 Gazans sheltering at our 149 facilities, as well as working at our healthcare centres.

Honour Mai's memory, honour all of the victims, by not allowing the fog of war to rob us of our humanity or the necessity for fact-based debate.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Deere', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

William Deere
Director
UNRWA Representative Office Washington