

Mr. William R. Deere  
Director  
UNRWA Representative Office  
1901 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Suite 804  
Washington, DC 20006  
United States

17 July 2023

Dear Mr. Deere,

Thank you for your letter of 21 May 2023, in response to our letter of 24 April 2023, however we must say that we regret your overall approach to the important issues that we raised.

We are gravely concerned by your continued attacks on civil society organizations that seek to combat racism and promote accountability. Your statements impugn the motives of UN Watch and IMPACT-se, and falsely brand our research as “not credible” solely because we did not share it with UNRWA in advance.

Indeed, according to the UNRWA statement of 18 March 2023, this same argument was disseminated by UNRWA in a briefing to “close partners” delivered by Leni Stenseth, Deputy Commissioner-General, who reportedly told donor states that that “this and previous similar reports have never been submitted to UNRWA for comments prior to publishing, in the way that any credible research organization would invariably require.”

This is a specious, misleading and disingenuous argument. The truth is that UN Watch has tried on *numerous and repeated occasions* to meet with UNRWA officials and to open a dialogue with your organization — yet on each occasion your agency slammed the door on us, and refused to meet with any of our representatives, answer any of our letters and emails, or to engage in any discussion. You simply refused all contact with us.

For example, on 19 April 2017, UN Watch executive director Hillel Neuer reached out by email to then Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl and requested to meet. The head of UNRWA refused to even answer. Once again, on 26 October 2021, Mr. Neuer sent a letter to current Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini, requesting “to engage in direct dialogue with you concerning the serious questions above, and the findings in our report, which have a significant impact on the lives and futures of both Israelis and Palestinians.” Again, the response of yet another head of UNRWA was silence, again shutting the door on engagement, cooperation and dialogue. Yet we did not give up. On

numerous occasions this year, including on 27 April, 12 May and 15 May, we requested again to meet with Mr. Lazzarini. We never received a single response.<sup>1</sup>

As I am sure you will agree, it is therefore a gross distortion for Ms. Stenseth to tell your donors — as you have told us in your letter — that our reports are not credible on the grounds that we did not reach out to UNRWA. The opposite is true.

Aside from persisting in your gratuitous attacks on us, your letter continues to downplay and minimize the problem. Indeed, your letter appears to deliberately obfuscate the issue by defending “the quality and efficiency” of UNRWA's education when our criticism concerns the educational *staff* and *content*, not quality and efficiency.

Furthermore, your letter misrepresents our research as being about staff social media posts, falsely claiming that the problem is miniscule because we only presented seven staff members who violated neutrality on social media. However, we have always made it very clear that our critique is not about staff social media posts, but about the fact that UNRWA is systematically hiring antisemitic and terror-supporting staff who influence impressionable young Palestinian students both inside and outside the classroom.

Since UNRWA does not publish the names of its employees, makes every effort to ensure that its staff members keep their social media profiles private so that these kinds of embarrassing examples won't be exposed, and we do not have access to what happens inside the classroom, our ability to find public examples of neutrality violations is already quite restricted.

Our research is limited to public social media posts of individuals who self-identify as UNRWA employees. Therefore, the fact that we were able to find over 100 examples among those public profiles suggests the opposite of what you claim—that if we had access to all staff activities in and out of the classroom, including on Facebook, we would find many more examples of Palestinian children unacceptably being exposed to hate and violence.

Indeed, even with our limited resources, we have documented how the violations are more widespread than just the examples we found, as we have shown other UNRWA staff and students endorsing the violent content. For example, our March 2023 report contained a violent post by an UNRWA student who [tagged](#) his UNRWA teacher Ayman Dlash, apparently knowing the teacher would endorse it; and UNRWA staff member Labibeh Iskandarani whose post praising Hitler was [endorsed](#) by other UNRWA employees. In our February 2017 report, we showed how UNRWA students [praised](#) UNRWA teacher Ghanem Naim Ghoneim's post venerating Hitler; and UNRWA principal

---

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., <https://twitter.com/HillelNeuer/status/1651669029025640473>; <https://twitter.com/UNWatch/status/1657016004646502401>; and <https://twitter.com/UNWatch/status/1658105779851870216>.

Ahmad Nasser [endorsed](#) a similar post celebrating Hitler by UNRWA teacher Omar Asaad.

Moreover, the fact that the UNRWA teacher's union in Lebanon, representing 1,786 teachers, rallied around Riad Nimr—who had been suspended in wake of our report for posting hateful content—instead of condemning him, and that children holding real-looking weapons were seen at the protests, shows that UNRWA's staff condones such views and that their students know this. Of UNRWA's 28,000 teachers and other staff, we are not aware of a single one who openly criticized Riad Nimr's hateful posts. Therefore, it is clear that the problem is far wider and systemic than the small selection that we publish.

Finally, we are troubled that your letter did not address our concerns about how UNRWA handled the Riad Nimr case. There does not appear to be a good reason that Nimr was reinstated other than that UNRWA felt threatened by its constituents and terrorist groups. Of course, this isn't the first time UNRWA caved into to such pressure. Matthias Schmale was forced out of his position in 2021 under pressure from Hamas after he told the truth about the precision of Israeli airstrikes in Gaza in targeting terrorists, not civilians. It is worrying that a neutral UN agency is prone to such pressure.

We wish to reach out to engage and cooperate with UNRWA to protect the human rights of Palestinian children, and of all in the region. To that end, our Executive Director, Mr. Hillel Neuer, wishes to meet with Mr. Lazzarini to discuss these important issues. Please advise if any of the following dates will be available: July 17- 30 in the Middle East, or September 1-15 in Europe.

Sincerely,



Dina Rovner

Legal Advisor