



the commissioner-general
المفوض العام

17 March 2026

Excellency, Madam President of the General Assembly,

Over the last two years, I alerted the General Assembly that UNRWA's ability to implement its mandate was increasingly in jeopardy and that urgent action was needed from Member States. As I conclude my tenure as Commissioner-General, I must inform you that UNRWA may soon no longer be viable, with potentially far-reaching consequences for Palestine Refugees at a time when the region faces seismic political and security challenges.

In December 2023, I wrote to the General Assembly that in 35 years of working in complex emergencies I had never had cause to report the killing of 130 personnel and to predict the killing of many more. I did not imagine then that the number of colleagues killed would triple, now reaching more than 390. Many others have sustained life-changing injuries or been arbitrarily detained and tortured.

Hundreds of UNRWA premises in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, including post-ceasefire. The parliament of Israel has adopted legislation to end the Agency's presence in occupied East Jerusalem and to further obstruct its operations across the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT). Israeli authorities are pressuring UN entities to stop working with UNRWA, by threatening them with denial of access to Gaza.

In occupied East Jerusalem, armed police forcibly shuttered our schools and health facilities, while local authorities cut electricity and water to all premises. The UNRWA headquarters in Sheikh Jarrah was seized, looted and set on fire, with senior Israeli officials celebrating the destruction in widely published video footage. A deputy mayor of Jerusalem called for UNRWA personnel to be "annihilated".

These attacks are unprecedented in the 80-year history of the United Nations. They violate international law – as recognized in advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice – and erode the foundational pillars of the United Nations Charter.

Relentless disinformation campaigns include allegations of Agency-wide neutrality breaches and assertions that our operations have been replaced in Gaza, where the Agency remains a major provider of primary healthcare, education, clean water, sanitation and hygiene. These unsubstantiated and malicious claims seek to justify actions against UNRWA and to undermine Member States' support.

Her Excellency Ms Annalena Baerbock
President of the General Assembly
New York

Since early 2024, my office has written repeatedly, without response, to the Government of Israel requesting evidence of its claims regarding breaches of neutrality and seeking an end to physical attacks against UNRWA personnel and premises.

The attacks against the Agency are not about neutrality or operationality. Rather, they seek to undermine UNRWA to weaken Palestinians' rights within Final Status issues in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

UNRWA does not have a political mandate. However, its direct provision of public-like services, its adherence to humanitarian principles, its public reporting on the situation on the ground, its registration of refugees and archives documenting their historical displacement, and its capacity to bolster Palestinian-led governance with a highly qualified corps of nearly 30,000 Palestinian civil servants, are all intrinsic to protecting Palestinian rights in Final Status determinations. The International Court of Justice has recognized that obstructing UNRWA deprives Palestinians of essential means of subsistence, threatening fundamental conditions necessary for the exercise of their right to self-determination.

The objective of denying Palestinians their rights similarly motivates the obstruction of international media from freely entering Gaza, the killing of hundreds of local journalists, the marginalization of international NGOs, and the attacks on the international legal and human rights system. These actions too are intended to limit reporting on facts, to limit the application of international law, to control how and where aid is delivered and, ultimately, to influence Final Status issues counter to General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, including Security Council resolution 2803.

In April 2025, to help Member States respond to UNRWA's worsening trajectory and severe underfunding, the Secretary-General commissioned a Strategic Assessment which concluded that UNRWA is key to regional peace and security, including for Israel, but faces collapse. Warning against the grave risks of inaction, the Assessment urged Member States to strengthen support to UNRWA operations; or, if this was not possible, to support a transition for the provision of its essential public-like services through a political process.

Despite the Secretary-General's July 2025 appeal for urgent action, there has been no follow-up.

In November 2025, at the General Assembly's Fourth Committee meeting on renewing UNRWA's mandate, I underlined that it would be insufficient to extend the mandate without also providing political and financial support to address the unprecedented challenges facing the Agency.

On 5 December 2025, the mandate was renewed for three years, but UNRWA's financial and operational situation has only worsened since then.

Consequently, I have been compelled to reduce service delivery hours, and therefore salaries for most local staff, by 20%. This is in addition to major cost-control and austerity measures extended since 2024, negatively affecting access to education, healthcare and other services for millions of Palestinians. With all the measures taken, UNRWA's projected cashflow shortfall has now dropped from over US\$ 200 million to approximately US\$ 100 million. Nevertheless, without significant new funding, additional measures will be required this year.

Looking ahead, as underscored in the New York Declaration, there is no doubt that UNRWA's massive workforce and expertise are vital for the successful implementation of Security Council resolution 2803 and the Gaza peace plan, specifically with regard to supporting humanitarian aid, public services, local governance, stabilization, and socioeconomic recovery. Further, at a time of immense fragility for the region as a whole, UNRWA is, by many orders of magnitude, the largest, best-established, most cost-effective UN humanitarian and development presence in the region.

It is therefore incomprehensible to record here that, without immediate political and financial support from Member States to deliver UNRWA's mandate and to protect against efforts to dismantle its operations, the Agency is near the end of its viability. The risks of fuelling further regional instability and harming Palestinian rights are immense.

I urge Member States, which have repeatedly renewed the Agency's mandate for over seven decades, to restore UNRWA's temporary nature by leveraging its expertise and workforce as key assets for the successful implementation of Security Council resolution 2803 in Gaza and for a broader political process that addresses the longstanding question of Palestine.

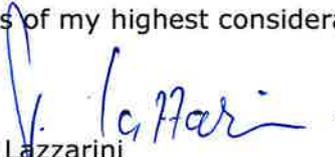
If Member States do not provide the required support for UNRWA to sustain its operations, then the full operational and financial responsibility for delivering services to Palestine Refugees would fall on Israel under its legal responsibility as the Occupying Power in the OPT; while Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, as host countries, would immediately face an enormous burden.

In my final letter to the General Assembly, I must state my horror that a United Nations entity has been allowed to be crushed as UNRWA has, in violation of international law, with its staff and Palestinian communities paying an unacceptable price. I am appalled that the Agency has become a proxy battleground for outcomes to the Israel-Palestine conflict and that Palestine Refugees have been so callously betrayed. While those who ordered and carried out the shameful actions against UNRWA carry the greatest responsibility, the General Assembly must also consider its responsibility.

I urge Member States to take appropriate action, even belatedly, to secure the long-term security and human rights of Palestinians and Israelis through a just and lasting political solution.

It has been an immense privilege to serve Palestine Refugees and to lead UNRWA at this time of greatest need. I salute the outstanding contributions of UNRWA personnel to peace and humanity and am honoured to have served alongside such extraordinary women and men.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.


Philippe Lazzarini