

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 5388

To restore funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for
Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

NOVEMBER 21, 2024

Mr. WELCH (for himself, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Ms. KLOBUCHAR,
and Ms. HIRONO) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and
referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

A BILL

To restore funding for the United Nations Relief and Works
Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “UNRWA Funding
5 Emergency Restoration Act of 2024”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

8 (1) The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has
9 reached a catastrophic emergency level, with at least
10 2,000,000 Palestinian civilians suffering daily due to

1 a lack of access to basic necessities of life caused by
2 the escalating conflict.

3 (2) In October 2024, the Integrated Food Secu-
4 rity Phase Classification’s Famine Review Com-
5 mittee concluded—

6 (A) the entire Gaza Strip is in IPC Phase
7 4 (Emergency) acute food insecurity; and

8 (B) there is a risk of famine for the entire
9 Gaza Strip between November 2024 and April
10 2025.

11 (3) Since 1949, the United Nations Relief and
12 Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near
13 East (referred to in this Act as “UNRWA”) has
14 played a vital and central role in providing shelter,
15 education, healthcare, and financial assistance to
16 millions of Palestinians living in vulnerable refugee
17 communities in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, Leb-
18 anon, and Jordan.

19 (4) UNRWA’s aid operations are essential to
20 meeting the humanitarian needs of Palestinian civil-
21 ians living in Gaza and elsewhere.

22 (5) Following allegations of direct involvement
23 by fewer than 20 UNRWA employees in the dev-
24 astating terrorist attacks of October 7, 2023,
25 UNRWA Commissioner-General Lazzarini acted

1 swiftly and decisively, fully cooperating with Israeli
 2 authorities, publicly disclosing the allegations, and
 3 immediately terminating all the employees who may
 4 have been involved. These fewer than 20 employees
 5 represent a small percentage of the approximately
 6 13,000 UNRWA employees in Gaza and UNRWA's
 7 total workforce of approximately 30,000.

8 (6) United Nations Secretary-General António
 9 Guterres took additional action, including—

10 (A) launching an investigation into the al-
 11 legations by the United Nation's highest over-
 12 sight body, the Office of Internal Oversight
 13 Services; and

14 (B) creating an Independent Review
 15 Group, led by former French Foreign Minister
 16 Catherine Colonna, to assess whether UNRWA
 17 is doing everything within its power to ensure
 18 neutrality and respond to allegations of serious
 19 neutrality breaches.

20 (7) In April 2024, the Independent Review
 21 Group—

22 (A) concluded that UNRWA—

23 (i) has established a significant num-
 24 ber of mechanisms and procedures to en-
 25 sure compliance with humanitarian prin-

1 ciples with an emphasis on the principle of
2 neutrality;

3 (ii) already possesses a more devel-
4 oped approach to neutrality than other
5 similar United Nations entities or non-
6 governmental organizations; and

7 (iii) recommended additional steps to
8 strengthen neutrality policies, all of which
9 UNRWA immediately agreed to fully im-
10 plement.

11 (8) UNRWA has implemented a High-Level Ac-
12 tion Plan to implement the Independent Review
13 Group's recommendations. As of September 2024—

14 (A) 2 recommendations have been fully im-
15 plemented;

16 (B) 17 recommendations are in progress;
17 and

18 (C) the timeline for implementing the re-
19 maining recommendations is outlined in
20 UNRWA's related High-Level Action Plan,
21 which articulates specific actions and resource
22 requirements.

23 (9) On October 28, 2024, Department of State
24 spokesperson Matthew Miller declared—

1 (A) UNRWA plays “an irreplaceable role
2 right now in Gaza, where they are on the front
3 lines getting humanitarian assistance to the
4 people that need it. There’s nobody that can re-
5 place them right now in the middle of the cri-
6 sis.”; and

7 (B) UNRWA plays “an important role
8 providing services to Palestinians in the West
9 Bank and throughout the region as well.”.

10 (10) On November 12, 2024, Ambassador
11 Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the United States Perma-
12 nent Representative to the United Nations, con-
13 firmed, “UNRWA’s role has been vital as the front-
14 line of this humanitarian response. The Agency fa-
15 cilitates approximately 80 percent of humanitarian
16 aid in Gaza.”.

17 (11) Following the decisive actions taken by the
18 United Nations and the commitments made by
19 UNRWA toward additional reforms, major member-
20 state supports of UNRWA, including the European
21 Union, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden,
22 Japan, France, Switzerland, Canada, The Nether-
23 lands, Australia, Italy, Austria, Finland, Iceland,
24 Romania, and Estonia have resumed their funding
25 to UNRWA.

1 (12) Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Belgium
2 have since provided resources to UNRWA beyond
3 their original commitments.

4 (13) The United States, which has historically
5 been the largest funder of UNRWA, plays a pivotal
6 role in supporting UNRWA’s critical mission.

7 (14) Properly vetted funding for UNRWA re-
8 mains in the comprehensive strategic interests of the
9 United States and its allies.

10 (15) In an October 13, 2024 letter to the State
11 of Israel Minister of Defense, Yoav Gallant, and the
12 State of Israel Minister of Strategic Affairs, Ron
13 Dermer, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Sec-
14 retary of Defense Lloyd Austin warned that 2 draft
15 bills being considered by the Knessett “would dev-
16 astate the Gaza humanitarian response” and “could
17 have implications under relevant U.S. law and pol-
18 icy”.

19 (16) On October 19, 2024, Ambassador Linda
20 Thomas-Greenfield, the United States Permanent
21 Representative to the United Nations, expressed
22 concerns about these 2 draft bills at the United Na-
23 tions Security Council Briefing on the Middle East,
24 and stated “there is no alternative to UNRWA when

1 it comes to delivering food and other life-saving aid
2 in Gaza”.

3 (17) On October 28, 2024, the Israel Knesset
4 approved these 2 bills, which bar UNRWA from op-
5 erating in Israel and will drastically curtail UNRWA
6 operations in the West Bank and Gaza.

7 (18) On November 1, 2024, the world’s leading
8 humanitarian coordination forum, known as the
9 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, declared that im-
10 plementation of the Knesset legislation “would be a
11 catastrophe for the humanitarian response in Gaza,
12 diametrically opposed to the United Nations Char-
13 ter, with potential dire impacts on the human rights
14 of the millions of Palestinians depending on
15 UNRWA’s assistance . . . there is no alternative to
16 UNRWA.”.

17 (19) If UNRWA cannot operate in the occupied
18 Palestinian territory, the responsibility for providing
19 services to Palestinians, and for bearing the cost of
20 these services, will lie not with the United Nations,
21 but with Israel.

22 **SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.**

23 Congress—

1 (1) recognizes that preventing further erosion
2 of civilian conditions in Gaza remains in the stra-
3 tegic and moral interests of the United States;

4 (2) supports UNRWA's unique and indispen-
5 sable contribution to immediately addressing urgent
6 humanitarian needs in Gaza, especially in mitigating
7 and stopping the spread of famine and disease;

8 (3) reaffirms the imperative of UNRWA's con-
9 tinued provision of humanitarian and human devel-
10 opment services to Palestinian refugees in all its cur-
11 rent fields of operation, including Jordan, Lebanon,
12 Syria, Gaza, and the West Bank (including East Je-
13 rusalem);

14 (4) urges the Government of Israel to assist
15 UNRWA in its neutrality efforts by providing
16 names, information, and evidence UNRWA can use
17 to aggressively pursue allegations related to staff
18 violations of UNRWA's neutrality policies;

19 (5) urges the President—

20 (A) to join United States allies in restoring
21 funding to UNRWA in response to the respon-
22 sible actions taken by the United Nations and
23 the commitments made by UNRWA toward ad-
24 ditional accountability and transparency; and

1 (B) to ensure continued funding to
2 UNRWA is assessed based on UNRWA's ongoing
3 execution of the recommendations of the
4 Independent Review Group, led by Catherine
5 Colonna;

6 (6) recognizes the implementation of some of
7 the Independent Review Group's recommendations
8 will require United Nations member state cooperation,
9 including additional funding;

10 (7) urges the United States and Israel to assist
11 UNRWA in its implementation efforts of the Independent
12 Review Group's recommendations; and

13 (8) supports appropriating critical funds to
14 UNRWA for fiscal year 2025 and beyond.

15 **SEC. 4. RESTORATION OF FUNDING FOR UNRWA.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—Beginning on the date of the enactment
17 of this Act—

18 (1) title III of division G of the Further Consolidated
19 Appropriations Act, 2024 (Public Law 118–47) is hereby repealed;

21 (2) section 308 of the Israel Security Supplemental
22 Appropriations Act, 2024 (division A of Public Law 118–50) is hereby repealed; and

24 (3) notwithstanding any other provision of law,
25 the Secretary of State shall, as soon as practicable—

1 (A) rescind the temporary pause in fund-
2 ing for UNRWA described in the press state-
3 ment entitled “Statement on UNRWA Allega-
4 tions” issued on January 26, 2024; and

5 (B) resume the provision of funding to
6 UNRWA under current authorities of the De-
7 partment of State.

8 (b) REPORTS.—Not later than 90 days after the date
9 of the enactment of this Act, and quarterly thereafter
10 through December 31, 2027, the Secretary of State shall
11 submit a report to the appropriate congressional commit-
12 tees of jurisdiction describing the steps UNRWA is taking
13 to implement the recommendations made by the Inde-
14 pendent Review Group, led by Catherine Colonna.

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