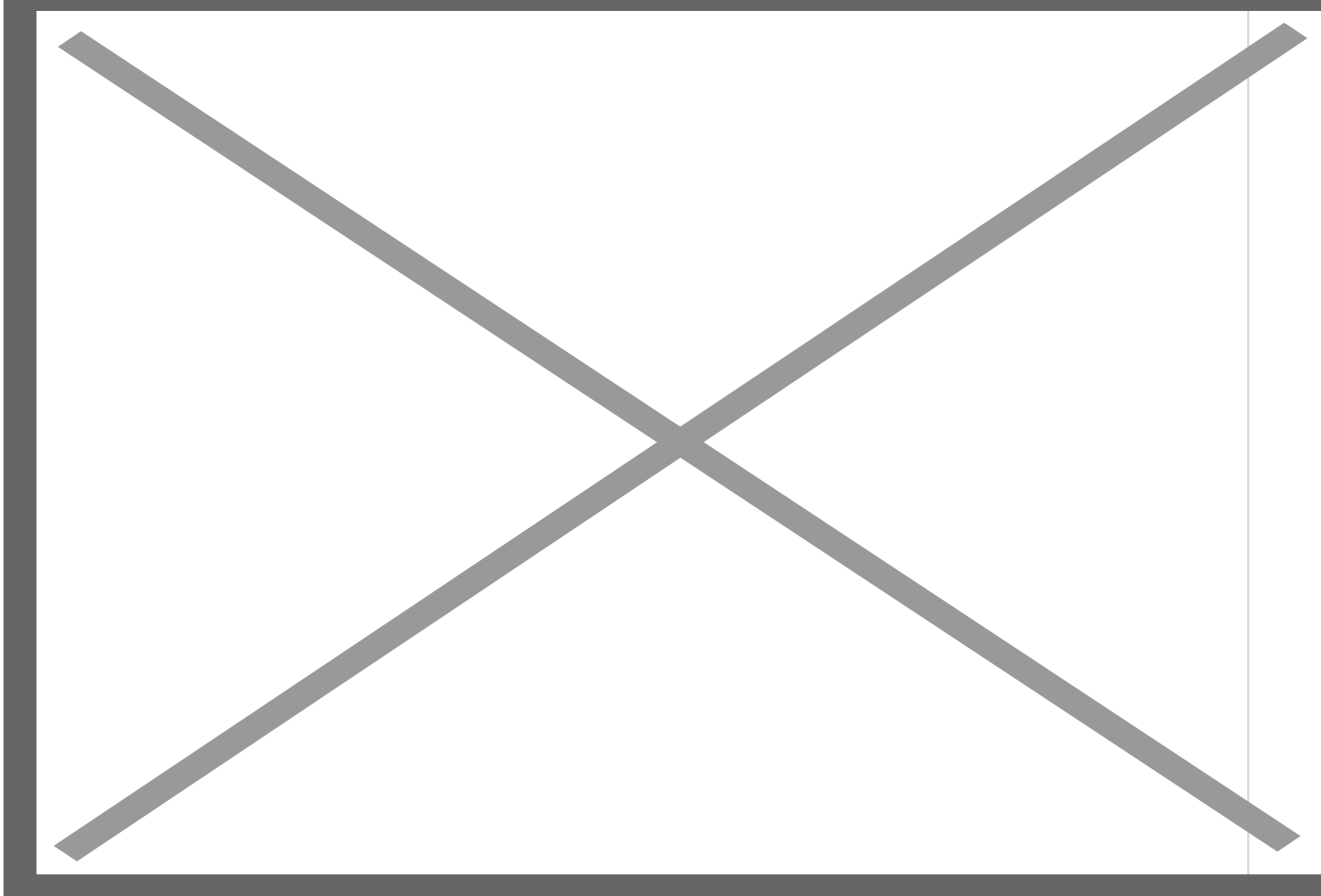


United Nations says UNRWA fund cuts by the West constitutes collective punishment against Palestinians

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Workers of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) hand

out flour rations and other supplies to people at an UNRWA warehouse in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip in December.

United Nations, January 28 (RHC)-- The decision to suspend aid to the UN Palestinian refugee agency by several Western countries is a "collective punishment," the head of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has said, as the UN chief Antonio Guterres joined him in urging donor nations to maintain much-needed Gaza aid.

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said he was shocked such decisions were taken as "famine looms" in Gaza, which has been devastated by nearly four months of relentless Israeli bombardment that has killed more than 26,000 people.

The agency, with its 13,000 employees in Gaza, is the main organization aiding Gaza's population amid the humanitarian disaster. More than two million of the besieged enclave's 2.3 million people depend on the UNRWA for "sheer survival," including food and shelter, Lazzarini said, warning this lifeline can "collapse any time now."

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also joined Lazzarini's call on Sunday, pleading for donor states to continue supporting the UN agency that runs aid operations in Gaza. "The dire needs of the desperate populations they serve must be met."

Guterres said that the UN employees involved in acts of "terror" will be held accountable but added that "the tens of thousands of men and women who work for UNRWA, many in some of the most dangerous situations for humanitarian workers, should not be penalized."

About 1,100 people, mostly civilians, were killed in the wake of the Hamas attack and about 240 captives were taken.

Nine out of 12 UNRWA staff members accused of involvement in the October 7 Hamas attack inside Israel have been terminated, according to the UN chief. One was confirmed dead and the identities of the other two were being clarified, he said.

"The Secretariat is ready to cooperate with a competent authority able to prosecute the individuals in line with the Secretariat's normal procedures for such cooperation."

The UN on Friday said it was investigating several agency employees over the allegations. But Israel has continued to attack the UN agency, with Foreign Minister Israel Katz calling for Lazzarini's resignation on Saturday.

Top Palestinian officials and Hamas have criticized the decision which they said "entails great political and humanitarian relief risks." "At this particular time and in light of the continuing aggression against the Palestinian people, we need the maximum support for this international organization and not stopping support and assistance to it," Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Secretary-General Hussein al-Sheikh wrote on X, urging the countries to "immediately reverse their decision."

Chris Gunness, a former UNRWA spokesman, says there is a "coordinated political attack" on the UN's agency for Palestinian refugees. "The Israelis have said they cannot win the war on Gaza unless UNRWA is disbanded. So what clearer signal do you want?" he told Al Jazeera.

The United States, which said 12 agency employees were under investigation, immediately suspended funding, followed by several other countries, including Britain, Germany, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, Finland, Switzerland and Italy.

On Sunday, the French foreign ministry announced that Paris has not planned any new payments to support UNRWA for the first quarter of this year and will decide when the time comes what action to take in conjunction with the UN and its other main donors.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell highlighted that the 27-member bloc would “assess further steps and draw lessons based on the result of the full and comprehensive investigation.” “While I understand their concerns – I was myself horrified by these accusations – I strongly appeal to the governments that have suspended their contributions to, at least, guarantee the continuity of UNRWA’s operations,” Guterres said.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/345628-united-nations-says-unrwa-fund-cuts-by-the-west-constitutes-collective-punishment-against-palestinians>



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