

Israel notifies UN of ending ties with UNRWA amid warning of famine in Gaza

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United Nations, November 5 (RHC)-- Israel has officially notified the United Nations of its decision to cut ties with its agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) as another UN agency warns of an impending famine in genocide-ravaged Gaza.

In a statement on Monday, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it cancelled a cooperation agreement from 1967 which provided the legal basis of the country's relations with UNRWA.

"UNRWA – the organization whose employees participated in the October 7th massacre and many of whose employees are Hamas operatives – is part of the problem in the Gaza Strip and not part of the solution," Foreign Minister Israel Katz was quoted as saying.

The Israeli parliament last week adopted two controversial bills banning UNRWA from operating on Israeli territory, closing its premises in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza.

Israel alleges fighters of Palestinian group Hamas have infiltrated UNRWA. The UN agency denies the allegations and says it takes measures to ensure its neutrality.

UNRWA on Monday said Israel's ban on its operations would lead to the "collapse" of humanitarian work in the war-torn Gaza Strip. "If this law is implemented, it would be likely to cause the collapse of the international humanitarian operation in the Gaza Strip – an operation of which UNRWA is the backbone," Jonathan Fowler, UNRWA spokesman, told the AFP news agency.

The UN agency provides education, healthcare and other basic services to Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation and their descendants, who now number nearly six million. Refugee families make up the majority of Gaza's 2.3 million population.

Aid groups have warned that Israel's ban on UNRWA could create further obstacles to addressing a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Israel has said other UN agencies and aid groups can fill the gap, but those organisations insist UNRWA is essential.

Israel's notification to the UN came as the World Food Programme (WFP) on Monday warned that the humanitarian situation in Gaza "could soon escalate into famine" as Israeli forces continue to severely restrict the entry of food and other supplies into the enclave.

On Saturday, a WFP official said the agency cannot serve as a replacement for UNRWA in Gaza. "We cannot replace the important functions of the UNRWA in Gaza, such as the administration of emergency shelters, schools and health centres," Martin Frick, head of the WFP Berlin office, told German media group RND.

In January, Israel claimed that more than a dozen UNRWA members took part in a Hamas-led attack on Israel last year, in which Palestinian fighters killed more than 1,100 people, mostly civilians, and took about 250 captives.

After the assault, the Israeli army waged a ferocious military campaign in Gaza, killing more than 43,000 people so far, displacing almost its entire 2.3 million population, and reducing large swaths of the Palestinian enclave into rubble.

The UN launched an investigation into Israel's allegations which resulted in the termination of contracts of nine staff members against which "the evidence – if authenticated and corroborated – could indicate that the UNRWA staff members may have been involved" in the attack.

In July, Israel claimed that another 100 UNRWA employees were members of Hamas and other Palestinian groups. The agency asked Israel to provide more information to take action. UNRWA on

Monday told Al Jazeera it had not received any response.

Meanwhile, UN officials say Israeli forces have killed more than 130 of their workers in a year in Gaza – the largest such toll in any conflict since the global body was founded.

[SOURCE: NEWS AGENCIES]

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