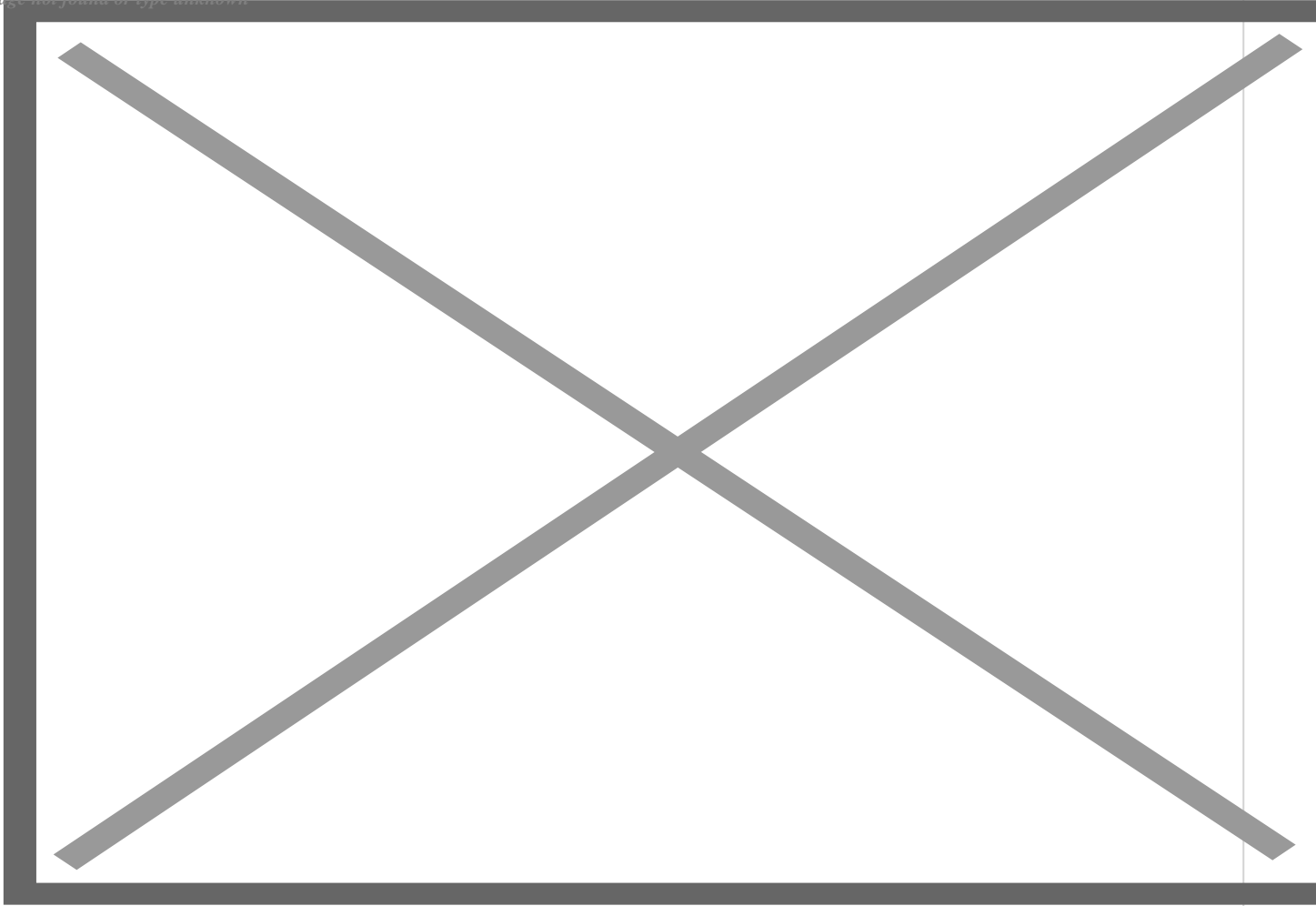


UN rejects U.S.-backed Gaza aid plan, citing lack of neutrality

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Palestinians wait to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen, in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip [Mahmoud Issa/Reuters]

United Nations, May 16 (RHC)-- The United Nations has said it will not take part in a U.S.-backed humanitarian operation in Gaza because it is not impartial, neutral or independent, as Israel pledged to facilitate the effort without being involved in aid deliveries.

“This particular distribution plan does not accord with our basic principles, including those of impartiality, neutrality, independence, and we will not be participating in this,” deputy UN spokesperson Farhan Haq told reporters on Thursday.

The U.S.-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation will start work in Gaza by the end of May under a heavily criticized aid plan that the UN aid chief Tom Fletcher described as a “fig leaf for further violence and displacement” of Palestinians in Gaza.

Speaking to reporters in Antalya, Turkiye, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Thursday acknowledged the criticisms and said Washington was open to any alternative plan to get aid to civilians “without Hamas being able to steal it.”

“We’re not immune or in any way insensitive to the suffering of the people of Gaza, and I know that there’s opportunities here to provide aid for them,” Rubio said after speaking with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier on Thursday.

“There are criticisms of that plan. We’re open to an alternative if someone has a better one,” he said.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said on Thursday that the UN “has a solid and principled operational plan to deliver humanitarian aid and life-saving services at scale and immediately across the Gaza Strip.”

A report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative released earlier this week said the Gaza Strip “is still confronted with a critical risk of famine” after more than a year and a half of devastating war, with the vast majority of its approximately 2.1 million people at severe risk.

In a bid to address some concerns, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation has asked Israel to expand an initial limited number of so-called secure aid distribution sites in Gaza’s south to the north within 30 days. It has also asked Israel to let the UN and others resume aid deliveries now until it is set up.

“I’m not familiar with those requests, maybe when they went into Jerusalem, but I will tell you that we appreciate the effort of the United States,” Israel’s UN Ambassador Danny Danon told reporters on Thursday.

“We will not fund those efforts. We will facilitate them. We will enable them,” he said. “We will not be the ones giving the aid ... It will be run by the fund itself, led by the United States.”

Israel and the US have urged the UN and aid groups to cooperate and work with the foundation. It is unclear how the foundation will be funded. A Department of State spokesperson said no U.S. government funding would go to the foundation.

A fact sheet on the foundation, circulating among the aid community last week, listed respected former UN World Food Programme chief David Beasley as a potential adviser. However, a source familiar with the effort said Beasley was not currently involved.

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