

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 30, 2023

António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations
United Nations Headquarters
1 UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Secretary-General Guterres:

I am appalled by the recent reports that Israeli hostages were held in Gaza by at least one teacher working for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

[According](#) to Almog Boker, a journalist and presenter with Israel's Channel 13 news, one of the hostages was held for nearly fifty days in the attic of an UNRWA teacher. An additional hostage was held by a doctor in Gaza. This comes on top of reports that teachers and other educational staff of UNRWA staff, among others, [praised](#) Hamas's terrorism on October 7, calling it (among other things) an "unforgettable glorious morning" and a "splendid sight!"

This points to two tremendously concerning issues. First, these actions indicate a broader problem of UN officials and their complicity with these atrocities. Over half of the 500,000 students in Gaza attend UNRWA-run educational institutions, which have long been [noted](#) for their demonization of Israel, perpetuation of antisemitism, and incitement of violence. Despite significant violence against Israeli women, for example, groups like the United Nations Women organization – an official office of the UN – have also attempted to remain silent about Hamas, even deleting statements that [condemn](#) the group by name.

Second, it suggests the deep radicalization of the Palestinian population beyond Hamas members, which appears to have little appetite or interest for living in peace with Israelis. I refer you to horrific images of Palestinian mobs harassing, intimidating, and beating Israeli hostages being [taken](#) and released, including children. I further point you to reports that Gaza civilians were [among those](#) who entered Israeli towns and attacked civilians, including families with small children and babies. I have seen few Palestinian groups or spokesmen condemn those atrocities.

As you know, UNRWA provides services for about 5.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The Trump Administration decision in 2018 to stop further contributions to UNRWA came specifically in response to these issues: the intermingling of a radical anti-Israel agenda and actions with the nominally neutral auspices of the UN. By the time President Trump halted contributions to UNRWA, the US was providing approximately one-third of UNRWA's budget. Though the Biden Administration reversed that policy, this past year the US House imposed significant new [restrictions](#) on the Biden Administration's funding of UNRWA in the Fiscal Year 2024 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill.

These include ensuring the neutrality of UNRWA staff, preventing its facilities from being used for military purposes, and abiding by financial transparency requirements. This bill also requires ensuring that anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli materiel is not present at UNRWA schools and facilities, and that UNRWA resources are not used to spread antisemitic messages or incite violence.

I urge you in the strongest possible terms to investigate these allegations that UNRWA educational personnel were complicit in the hostage taking. If so, a fundamental change needs to be made at the UN and in UNRWA specifically.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Waltz", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Michael Waltz
Member of Congress
House Committee on Foreign Affairs