



PR#176-24

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Statement on the Israeli Legislation on UNRWA**

*Belmopan, November 5, 2024.*

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade has learnt with alarm of the notification on Monday, 4th November 2024, by the State of Israel to the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations that it withdraws its request issued to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in 1967. This comes one week after the Israeli legislature passed two bills to prohibit the country's authorities from having any contact with UNRWA and bar the agency from operating within Israel.

At the time, UN Secretary-General Guterres stressed that the effective ban would have “devastating consequences.”

The heads of the UN agencies and organizations providing humanitarian support on the ground in Gaza have all spoken out against the Israeli ban on UNRWA.

The acting head of the UN aid coordination office called the decision “dangerous and outrageous”, whilst UNRWA's head said that the bills will “increase the suffering of the Palestinians and are nothing less than collective punishment.” The UN Human Rights Office declared that aid deliveries will “grind to a halt” without UNRWA, and the World Health Chief called the development “intolerable.” UNICEF chief Catherine Russell declared that “this decision is dangerous; the lives and futures of Palestinian children are at stake,” while James Elder, a UNICEF staffer in the region, denounced the decision, saying “a new way has been found to kill children.”

UNRWA is irreplaceable. It is not just an aid agency. It provides education, healthcare, social services and protection for Palestinian refugees. In Gaza, starvation and deprivation of water and the destruction of health services have been used by the Israeli state to complement its bombing and shelling in its commission of genocide. Israel has ignored the binding orders of the International Court of Justice to stop the killing and allow humanitarian aid. UNRWA has so far been able to fill some of the people's needs, but its banning is certain to cause a substantial increase in the number of people dying and suffering from lack of food, water and health care. It is no less than a death warrant gratuitously and heartlessly inflicted on hundreds of thousands of children, women and the elderly by the Israeli state.

Belize firmly and unequivocally condemns this latest illegal action of the state of Israel and calls on the international community and all members of the United Nations to ensure that UNWRA is not dismantled, and that international humanitarian law is adhered to. There must at the very least be a total ban on the sale or transfer of arms to Israel, and means must be found to take life-saving aid to the Palestinian people. Israel can no longer simply be allowed to exterminate a people.

**Ends**