

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

February 2, 2024

The Honorable António Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations
760 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Secretary-General:

We request that you immediately dismiss the commissioner of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Philippe Lazzarini. Commissioner Lazzarini has failed to enforce and uphold UNRWA's existing regulations that express "zero tolerance for hate speech and incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence." Recent press reports indicate that at least twelve UNRWA employees had participated in Hamas's violent attacks on Israeli and international civilians on October 7, 2023. Instead of suspending all employees with ties to Hamas while the United Nations (UN) Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) investigation is ongoing, Lazzarini defended UNRWA staff involvement in the terrorist attacks and criticized countries that have rightfully taken steps to prevent their taxpayer dollars from continuing to fund acts of terrorism by UNRWA staff. He has also failed to determine how many more UNRWA staff were participants in the horrific October 7th attacks. Let us be clear, all UNRWA staff who have supported, made statements in support of, or conducted and/or participated in violent acts should be suspended immediately, without pay, until a full and transparent international investigation has concluded.

Of the 12 UNRWA individuals who took part in the October 7th attack, six have been identified as committing violent and barbaric acts against civilian women, children, elderly, and men. It must be noted that the victims were not just Israeli civilians, but also included at least 200 citizens of other UN member states, including Argentina, Canada, China, France, Germany, Nepal, the Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Lazzarini's lack of care or regard for these victims is a blatant disregard for the values that the UN claims to espouse.

Contrary to Lazzarini, and other UNRWA defenders' statements that blamed these actions on just a "few bad apples," numerous other UNRWA staff and teachers have been implicated in helping to kidnap Israeli and international civilians, procuring weapons, and providing logistical support for Hamas's terrorist acts. If estimates are accurate, more than 1,300 UNRWA staff in Gaza have links to Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad. This does not include those UNRWA staff who are closely related to members of terrorist groups operating in Gaza. Furthermore, UNRWA teachers in Gaza celebrated Hamas's massacre on social media while UN

watchdogs found more than 180 cases of UNRWA educators, and staff, who have promoted hate and violence towards Jewish people since 2015.

Incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence by UNRWA staff is unacceptable. While Lazzarini has terminated a few employees during his tenure, he only did so as a result of international pressure. He has never taken proactive steps to root out antisemitism from within the organization nor has he held the significant number of pro-terrorist employees, who still remain on the payroll of UNRWA, accountable for their hate. UNRWA has proven time and time again they are not a responsible agency that cares for the needs of the most vulnerable. Rather, it is a political tool used by Hamas to continue enriching its coffers. Millions of people around the world depend on the lifesaving humanitarian assistance provided by the UN. The UN member states share an interest in ensuring such assistance is free of corruption, waste, and abuse. We urge you to immediately terminate Lazzarini's employment.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Susan M. Collins', written in a cursive style.

Susan M. Collins
U.S. Senator