

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Chairwoman Granger, Vice Chair Collins, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

We write to express deep concern about Congressional proposals to prohibit US funding for humanitarian relief to Gaza through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). We take the allegations against a dozen UNRWA employees very seriously and support the proactive steps that United Nations Secretary-General Guterres and UNRWA Commissioner-General Lazzarini are taking in response to these allegations, including the termination of the named employees, and an immediate investigation by the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services. We also strongly agree with Secretary-General Guterres that, should these allegations be substantiated, the UN will cooperate with competent authority to fully prosecute these individuals and make sure they are held accountable for their actions.

In another significant step, Secretary-General Guterres has named the appointees to the independent Review Group to assess whether UNRWA is doing everything within its power to ensure its political neutrality and to respond to allegations of serious breaches of professional standards whenever they are made.

Proposals by Congress to prohibit or reduce UNRWA funding will significantly erode the United States' ability to provide life-saving assistance and minimal social structure to Gaza's 2.2 million people. To date, over 29,000 Palestinians have been killed and tens of thousands more injured without access to functioning hospitals. This humanitarian crisis, if unchecked and exacerbated, will further destabilize Gaza, further increase tensions all across the Middle East, and continue to embolden Hamas and other terrorist groups. It is in the strategic interest of both the U.S. and all of its allies to continue funding UNRWA in order to stabilize the crisis-ridden region and tend to the humanitarian catastrophe that no other organization or agency will be able to effectively address.

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While the Appropriations Committees must ensure that US funds to UNRWA are appropriately vetted to ensure funds are expended as intended, we must also work carefully not to undermine the comprehensive humanitarian response in Gaza and elsewhere in the UNRWA operating region.

Currently, UNRWA only has sufficient funding through February. Congress must fully appropriate funding to UNRWA. As you have seen in recent weeks, international humanitarian NGOs and the major United Nations humanitarian organizations have made it clear the continuation of UNRWA operations is imperative to addressing the humanitarian crisis.¹ Their statements are especially relevant considering several of these UN humanitarian organizations would be required to drastically scale up their efforts at an impossible pace to fill the humanitarian void that would be created should the U.S. halt funding for UNRWA.

Secretary Blinken is correct that tensions must be reduced on Israel's northern border. We question though how that is achieved by terminating UNRWA's provision of food, healthcare, and education to the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who reside in Lebanon. The consequences of terminating UNRWA operations will reverberate across the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria as the closure of UNRWA terminates education for 250,000 children, access to health care for almost 2 million people, and financial assistance for over 900,000 of the most desperate Palestinian civilians.

Over 3,000 UNRWA employees continue to work under the most difficult of circumstances, having already lost 150 staff to the war, the largest mass casualty event of UN workers in the organization's nearly 80-year history. North of Wadi Gaza, UNRWA reports there are around 300,000 civilians remaining, many of whom are likely starving. They note that it has been impossible to get fuel in and nearly impossible to get food across the checkpoints. In the south, UNRWA has had an easier time providing food, but hygiene conditions have pervasively deteriorated. Further, recently forced to relocate from western Khan Younis, UNRWA left behind its health centers, shelters and warehouses and relocated to the Gazan coast. Already the Agency has re-registered 184,000 displaced civilians at this new location. To put it plainly, without UNRWA, humanitarian aid operations would likely shrivel away and collapse.

As the largest funder of UNRWA, it is critical that the U.S. continue to appropriate funds to support its important work. We encourage you to consider UNRWA's unique and essential role in delivering humanitarian aid in the region and recognize the proactive steps UNRWA has taken towards full accountability and transparency as you consider setting future funding levels for the agency.

Sincerely,

¹ *UNRWA funding cuts threaten Palestinian lives in Gaza and region, say 20 NGOs*, Oxfam (Jan. 29, 2024), <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/unrwa-funding-cuts-threaten-palestinian-lives-gaza-and-region-say-20-ngos>; Statement by Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee: We cannot abandon the people of Gaza, Inter-Agency Standing Committee (Jan. 30, 2024), <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-standing-committee/statement-principals-inter-agency-standing-committee-we-cannot-abandon-people-gaza>.

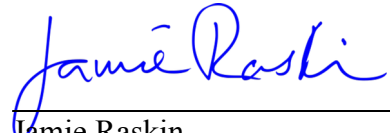
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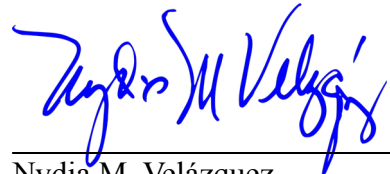


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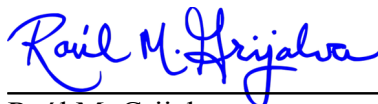
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Africans -
Sacrificed to Make America
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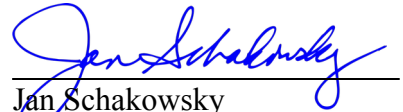


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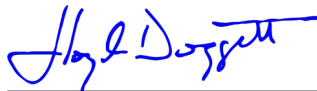
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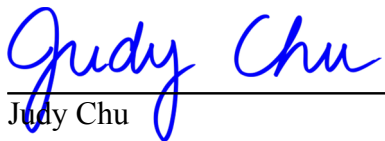
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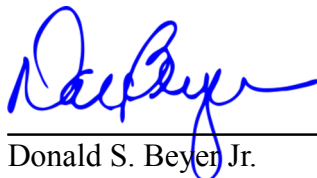
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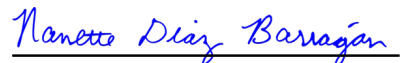
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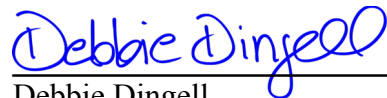
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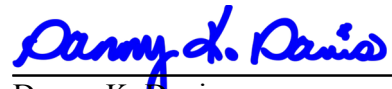
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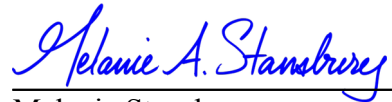
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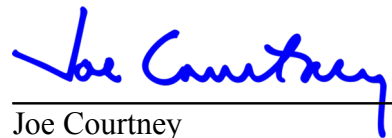
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