



29 January 2024

### **Australia's Decision to Pause Funding to UNRWA**

The General Delegation of Palestine in Canberra sent a letter today, 29 January, to the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon. Penny Wong, urgently appealing to the Australian government to reverse its deeply disappointing and regrettable decision to pause disbursement of recent funding to UNRWA, which will have dire implications for over 5.9 million Palestinian refugees across the region and especially in the Gaza Strip, where over 2 million desperate, besieged, and starving people are dependent on UNRWA's humanitarian work for their very survival.

This decision amounts to collective punishment of millions of Palestinian people. It is particularly alarming given the context of the [26 January ruling by the International Court of Justice](#) (ICJ), which included the order that ***"Israel must take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip"***.

This decision by the Australian government came in response to criminal allegations made by Israel against 12 UNRWA employees. It is extremely unfortunate that the decision to pause funding was made prior to a thorough investigation and in spite of UNRWA's immediate response to the allegations which included terminating the employees' contracts and asking for a transparent independent investigation. It should be understood in this context that UNRWA has 30,000 employees, of which 13,000 are in the Gaza Strip, and that UNRWA has neither the mandate nor the capacity for individual vetting of employees' political views and affiliations. [UNRWA Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini](#) has confirmed that UNRWA shares a list of all staff with host countries every year, including Israel, and "never received any concerns on specific staff members."

If UNRWA collapses or is forced to suspend its humanitarian response, there is not one other organisation capable of filling the Agency's role as the primary provider of humanitarian assistance in Gaza. [UN Secretary General Guterres](#) warned yesterday that, ***"2 million civilians in Gaza depend on critical aid from UNRWA for daily survival but UNRWA's current funding will not allow it to meet all requirements to support them in February."*** As stated by [UN Humanitarian Chief Martin Griffiths](#): ***"The people of Gaza have been enduring unthinkable horrors and deprivation for close to four months. Their needs have never been higher – and our humanitarian capacity to assist them has never been under such threat. We need to be at full stretch to give the people of Gaza a moment of hope. Now is not the time to let them down."***

*For more information, please contact the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific.*