



Senator the Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Via: foreign.minister@dfat.gov.au

29 February 2024

Dear Senator Wong,

It is now nearly one month since the government announced a temporary pause in Australia's funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The suspension followed an allegation from the government of Israel that 12 UNWRA employees in Gaza had been involved in Hamas' October 7 terrorist attacks.

These allegations are extremely concerning and serious. It is critical that Australian aid does not ever fund or indirectly support terrorists, and that those responsible for the horrific attacks on October 7 are brought to justice.

However, we also recognise the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and the central role that UNRWA plays in providing relief to hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinian civilians. We understand that no other aid provider in Gaza has the scale and capacity to replace UNRWA's efforts. We acknowledge the increase in aid that the Australian government has provided to address these needs since it came to office.

We have spoken with Thomas White, UNRWA's on the ground Director of Humanitarian Affairs, about what steps have been taken in relation to these concerns. Mr White is an Australian who has worked in this position for more than two years, with decades of experience in aid and conflict zones, including for Fred Hollows Foundation, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and Save the Children.

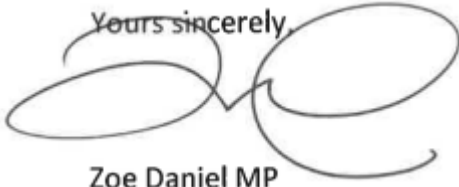
Mr White told us that UNRWA acted by immediately dismissing those employees and deploying three experienced internal investigators from its New York headquarters to conduct detailed inquiries. Former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna has also been appointed to lead a review of whether the agency is doing everything in its power to ensure its own neutrality. Mr White says that UNRWA has sought to engage with the Israeli government on these matters. He shared that UNRWA is unclear what more it can do for funding to be restored before the situation in Gaza becomes even more dire.

Amid emerging evidence of malnutrition, it is our clear understanding that unless international partner funding to UNRWA is restored by the end of March, UNRWA will not be able to pay its workers and its humanitarian operations in Gaza will collapse.

We recognise the government needs to balance these two legitimate concerns – ensuring our aid does not support terrorism, while supporting Palestinian civilians in a dire humanitarian situation.

However, given the scale of the current humanitarian requirements, we believe that it is critical that either an alternative pathway is found to deliver urgent aid, or that the government provides immediate clear direction as to what actions UNRWA can feasibly take in order that funding can be restored before we bear witness to a humanitarian collapse in Gaza.


Yours sincerely,



Zoe Daniel MP
Member for Goldstein



Monique Ryan MP
Member for Kooyong



Allegra Spender MP
Member for Wentworth



Zali Steggall MP
Member for Warringah



Andrew Wilkie MP
Member for Clark



Kate Chaney MP
Member for Curtin



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Kylea Tink MP
Member for North Sydney



Helen Haines MP
Member for Indi

Cc: Hon. Anthony Albanese MP, Prime Minister