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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Washington, D.C. - December 17, 2025**

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### **Press Release: UNRWA USA Leads 104 Organizations, Urging Trump Administration to Include UNRWA in Gaza's Recovery**

December 17, 2025, Washington, D.C.- UNRWA USA National Committee (UNRWA USA) led a national coalition of 104 civil society organizations, including Churches for Middle East Peace, to urge the Trump Administration to include the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in its plans for Gaza's recovery.

In a [joint letter](#) to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, refugee, human rights, and humanitarian organizations called on the Trump Administration **“to re-open lines of communication with UNRWA and allow the Agency to continue fulfilling its mandate in accordance with international humanitarian principles, until a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees is secured.”**

UNRWA remains the backbone of the humanitarian response in the Gaza Strip, with some 12,000 local staff delivering life-saving services every day, including 40 percent of all primary healthcare. Four independent investigations have affirmed the Agency's neutrality. Despite this, the Administration maintains that UNRWA will have no role in Gaza's future and continues to block critical humanitarian funding from the US government.

“The message from the American public is unmistakable: the U.S. government must restore support for UNRWA,” said **Mara Kronenfeld, Executive Director of UNRWA USA.** “UNRWA’s staff have never stopped serving their communities, despite immense loss and displacement. Attempts to sideline the Agency only deepen humanitarian suffering and contribute to wider efforts to delegitimize an institution that has safeguarded the rights of Palestine refugees since 1950.”

UNRWA USA National Committee ([UNRWA USA](#)), which supports the work of [UNRWA](#) through grassroots advocacy, education, and fundraising in the United States, spearheaded the coalition effort alongside partners [Refugees International](#), the [Arab American Institute \(AAI\)](#), [Friends Committee on National Legislation](#), [A New Policy](#), and other partners advocating for the rights of Palestine refugees.

Humanitarian experts stressed that excluding UNRWA would have consequences far beyond Gaza's immediate relief needs. **Natasha Hall, Senior Advocate for the Middle East at Refugees International**, emphasized "UNRWA remains the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza, with unmatched capacity, infrastructure, and community trust. Independent investigations have consistently affirmed its neutrality, and excluding UNRWA would undermine humanitarian effectiveness—and ultimately jeopardize regional stability and the success of a U.S.-brokered ceasefire."

Faith-based and humanitarian leaders emphasized that excluding UNRWA from Gaza's recovery would undermine any credible reconstruction effort. **Christine Mangale, Director for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ECLA)'s Lutheran Office for World Community, New York**, underscored that, "international humanitarian actors like UNRWA play a critical role in serving and protecting the hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people affected by crisis." She added that failing to include UNRWA "leaves out essential experience, knowledge, and capacity that is urgently needed for the success of the comprehensive plan."

Advocates also warned that political attacks on UNRWA have come at the expense of humanitarian necessity. **Maya Berry, Executive Director of the Arab American Institute (AAI)**, noted that "as it has always done since its founding—and as UN member states are obligated to do—UNRWA is providing critical assistance and services to Palestinian refugees." She continued, "Instead of increasing our support to UNRWA as the genocide in Gaza unfolded, the United States allowed it to be targeted by politically motivated attacks and coordinated disinformation campaigns. Those efforts must be rejected, and any credible efforts to aid the Palestinian people or to help rebuild Gaza must include UNRWA as a core humanitarian partner."

Policy experts stressed the consequences of continued U.S. disengagement. "UNRWA is the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza, reaching people and places no other actor can," said **Hassan El-Tayyab, Friends Committee on National Legislation Legislative Director for Middle East Policy**. "At a moment of immense humanitarian need and a stalled peace process, abandoning UNRWA would mean abandoning millions who rely on it for survival and would lead to escalating political instability. The Administration must restore support, and Congress must pass the UNRWA Emergency Funding Restoration Act so UNRWA can continue its indispensable mission to support Palestine refugees."

UNRWA USA is calling on grassroots advocates nationwide to [urge their members of Congress](#) to co-sponsor the **UNRWA Funding Emergency Restoration Act**, restore United States government

funding to the UN agency, and continue fighting misinformation by sharing the facts about UNRWA's irreplaceable humanitarian work.

You can find the UNRWA Press Release [HERE](#), and read the full letter to Secretary Rubio below and [HERE](#):

December 16, 2025

Dear Secretary Rubio:

We, the undersigned 104 civil society organizations, write to respectfully request the inclusion of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the President's implementation of Gaza's recovery.

We are grateful for the President's leadership and efforts in securing a ceasefire agreement and advancing peace in the region. As the plan moves into implementation, our organizations are deeply concerned that continued reluctance to utilize UNRWA's established and proven humanitarian and human development network may hinder hard-earned progress. For more than 75 years, UNRWA has worked in the Gaza Strip, developing a capacity and expertise that cannot be replicated or replaced. Excluding UNRWA from Gaza's rehabilitation risks slowing recovery, increasing instability, and undermining the very goals of the President's plan.

Global disinformation campaigns have eroded trust in the UN, including UNRWA. Such efforts serve to undermine the mandate established by the UN General Assembly and Security Council for the provision of life-saving services and support, pending a just resolution to the seven decades long plight of Palestine refugees. We urge the Administration to make decisions based on verified facts.

Over the past two years, four independent investigations into UNRWA's neutrality, launched at different times and taking different investigative perspectives, including one performed by the U.S. National Intelligence Council, all reached the same conclusion: UNRWA is, and remains, a neutral and impartial organization.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, the Council also noted that Israeli bias has led to mischaracterizations and distortions in assessments of UNRWA.<sup>2</sup>

Recent press accounts add further weight to the importance of grounding policy in fact. The State Department Inspector General is investigating potential Israeli violations of the Leahy Law<sup>3</sup>, and Israeli military lawyers have notified the United States of evidence that could support war-crime charges related to Israel's latest military campaign in Gaza. According to these reports, the intelligence "pointed to doubts within the Israeli military about the legality of its tactics that contrasted sharply with Israel's public stance defending its actions".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The four investigations include: U.S. National Intelligence Council (Feb 2024), Independent Review of UNRWA Adherence to Neutrality (Colonna Report, August 2024), UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) investigation into 19 UNRWA staff (August 2024), ICJ Advisory Opinion on Israel's Obligations (October 2025)

<sup>2</sup> Wall Street Journal, 2/21/2024, "Intelligence report says Washington can't verify Israeli assertions about widespread links to militant groups"

<sup>3</sup> Washington Post, 10/30/2025, "Classified U.S. report finds backlog of hundreds of possible Israeli human rights violations"

<sup>4</sup> IBID

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*Formed in 1984, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is a coalition of more than 30 national church communions and organizations, including Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Evangelical traditions that works to encourage US policies that actively promote a comprehensive resolution to conflicts in the Middle East with a focus on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. CMEP works to mobilize US Christians to embrace a holistic perspective and to be advocates of equality, human rights, security, and justice for Israelis, Palestinians, and all people of the Middle East.*

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Recent CMEP Statements and Press Releases:

**Dec 15, 2025: CMEP Condemns the Terrorist Attack at Bondi Beach:**

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) joins the Council of Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem in strongly condemning the horrific terrorist attack at Bondi Beach in Australia, which targeted the Jewish community on the first night of Hanukkah. We echo their unequivocal rejection of this violence and stand in deep solidarity with the Jewish community in Australia and across the world.

**Dec 10, 2025: Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Elevates the Findings of the “Protecting Holy Land Christians” Report**

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) welcomes and affirms the newly released Protecting Holy Land Christians report and its urgent call to safeguard the Christian presence in the Holy Land. We stand in deep solidarity with our sisters and brothers whose testimonies fill these pages, and we bear witness to the daily realities facing Christian communities, churches, and institutions across Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem.

**Dec 9, 2025: Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Calls for Respect of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church and Recognition of its Independence from Government Interference**

In light of the Church's historic and ongoing role, CMEP urges full respect for the Armenian Apostolic Church's independence and internal governance vis-à-vis the Armenian State. Matters concerning the election of the Catholicos of All Armenians or the discipline of clergy should remain within the Church's own canonical processes, free from external interference and secular political influences and interventions.

**Nov 17, 2025: Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) upon the Release of Kairos Palestine**

**2**

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) acknowledges the release of Kairos Palestine 2 as a profound theological testimony written in the rubble of Gaza, in the dust of demolished homes, in the

tears of mothers, and in the refugee camps of Palestine. It is a theology of the cross, born of suffering, endurance, and deep faith, yet also a theology of hope: faith and love from the heart of suffering. As we receive this new Kairos Document, we do so with humility and sobriety. We hear the pain, the longing for liberation, and the steadfast conviction that justice and peace are aligned with God's purposes for the holy land. We also recognize that Kairos Palestine 2 challenges all of us, especially churches and Christians in the West, to confront unjust systems that deny human liberty and freedom.

### **Nov 12, 2025: Joint Statement by U.S. Organizations concerning the potential inclusion of Azerbaijan in the planned International Security Force for Gaza**

We, the below-listed U.S. nongovernmental organizations are deeply concerned by media reports that the International Security Force (ISF) planned for Gaza under President Trump's 20-Point Plan may include a military contingent from Azerbaijan, and urge the United States and other partners to reject such a presence. International third party security or peacekeeping forces can be an important element of post-conflict stabilization, but as the performance of certain militaries operating under the MONUSCO mission in Congo and the MINUSTAH mission in Haiti demonstrate, it is vital that such forces bring both impartiality and a track record of respect for human rights.

**See all of our [public statements](#) and [press releases](#).**

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