

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 22, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to express grave concern regarding the resumption of U.S. foreign assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We are concerned that this administration's decision to resume U.S. assistance to UNRWA was made in haste, without any actionable attempt to secure much-needed and meaningful reforms of the agency.

UNRWA, which was originally designed as a temporary agency to address Palestinian refugees' needs in the aftermath of the 1948 Israeli-Arab conflict, has far outlived its mandate. Over the last 60 years, the agency has devolved into a body which provides assistance to a population that does not use the same standard definition of a refugee as the rest of the world. In fact, some of the population that UNRWA provides assistance to have citizenship in the countries of which they reside.

Beyond its inflated and duplicative structure, there are serious concerns about the impartiality of UNRWA. Over the years the agency has employed individuals affiliated with Hamas, a U.S. designated terrorist organization. UNRWA schools have been used to store Hamas weapons. Additionally, there have been numerous cases of UNRWA textbooks including material that is anti-Semitic, such as encouraging the destruction of the state of Israel and supporting martyrdom and/or violent jihad. It is troubling that these issues regarding the impartiality of UNRWA, including its education system, have yet to be sufficiently addressed despite this administration's decision to restore U.S. funding.

The United States has been one of the most generous donors to the Palestinian people. Our assistance is designed to be humanitarian in nature. However, UNRWA has grown into a bloated organization which does not embody the shared values between the United States and United Nations.

Prior to resuming funding in UNRWA the United States should secure the following reforms:

- Require independent verification that all UNRWA employees, employees of UNRWA partner organizations, and employees of UNRWA contracting entities are not affiliated with Hamas, Hezbollah or other foreign terrorist organizations, and
- Require independent verification that textbooks used by UNRWA do not include extremist and anti-Semitic content. This verification should be done by an organization agreed to jointly by the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken

April 22, 2021

Page 2

- A policy of automatic suspension of all U.S. assistance to UNRWA if UNRWA facilities are used to house arms/ equipment involved in terrorist activity, and
- Require UNRWA to allow U.S. government to audit the organization, and
- Release publically the number of true UNRWA refugees and the number of “refugees” that have secured citizenship in the country they reside.

Due to the significance of this issue, we urge you cease U.S. government assistance to UNRWA unless true reform as described above is secured. We appreciate your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



THOM TILLIS
U.S. Senator



MARSHA BLACKBURN
U.S. Senator



CHARLES E. GRASSLEY
U.S. Senator



RICK SCOTT
U.S. Senator



SUSAN M. COLLINS
U.S. Senator



JOHN BARRASSO, M.D.
U.S. Senator



BEN SASSE
U.S. Senator



ROB PORTMAN
U.S. Senator



MIKE CRAPO
U.S. Senator



PAT TOOMEY

U.S. Senator



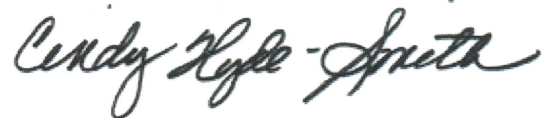
STEVE DAINES

U.S. Senator



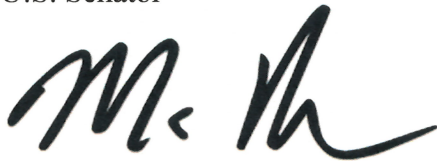
ROGER MARSHALL

U.S. Senator



CINDY HYDE-SMITH

U.S. Senator



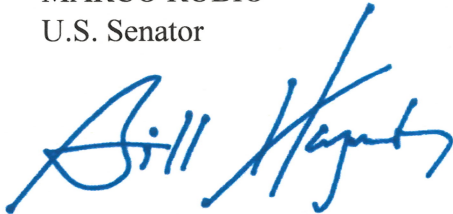
MARCO RUBIO

U.S. Senator



DEB FISCHER

U.S. Senator



BILL HAGERTY

U.S. Senator



JOHN BOOZMAN

U.S. Senator



TODD YOUNG

U.S. Senator



JOHN THUNE

U.S. Senator



JAMES M. INHOFE

U.S. Senator