



Security Council

Eightieth year

9852nd meeting

Tuesday, 28 January 2025, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Bendjama	(Algeria)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Fu Cong
	Denmark	Ms. Lassen
	France	Mrs. Meyer
	Greece	Mr. Rakinas
	Guyana	Ms. Benn
	Pakistan	Mr. Akram
	Panama	Mrs. Petrocelli Rojas
	Republic of Korea	Mr. June Byoung Park
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Ms. Karim
	Slovenia	Mrs. Košir
	Somalia	Mr. Osman
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America	Mr. Curiel

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.05 p.m.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. Gómez Hernández (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) at a most critical time for the Agency. I also thank Mr. Lazzarini for briefing the Council.

On behalf of Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Slovenia and Spain, I would like to express our full support to Mr. Lazzarini and UNRWA and to commend their essential work across the region, most notably in the occupied Palestinian territory. I wish to pay special tribute to UNRWA personnel in Gaza for their work and sacrifice in providing assistance and protection to the civilian population.

We deeply deplore the adoption by the Israeli Knesset, on 28 October 2024, of legislation aimed at abolishing UNRWA's activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. If implemented, the main goal of the legislation would aim to suspend UNRWA's operations in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, thereby hampering UNRWA's vital operations in Gaza. We are also deeply concerned about the notification to UNRWA to cease its operations and evacuate its premises in East Jerusalem by 30 January.

We condemn Israel's withdrawal from the 1967 agreement between Israel and UNRWA and any attempt to obstruct its capacity to operate and carry out its General Assembly mandate, which has been consistently extended since UNRWA's establishment in 1949. We demand the suspension of the entry into force of those laws, in compliance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the provisional measures demanded by the International Court of Justice. We urge the Israeli Government to abide by its international obligations and to uphold its responsibility to allow and facilitate full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian assistance throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular in Gaza.

We support UNRWA as part of our humanitarian commitment and our firm defence of, and respect for, international law, including international humanitarian law. UNRWA remains more essential than ever. It constitutes the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza and is indispensable in the implementation of the ceasefire to allow for the much-needed scaling up of humanitarian relief for thousands of Palestine refugees and civilians. UNRWA not only provides life-saving support through humanitarian assistance, but it also ensures the delivery of essential basic services such as education and healthcare assistance, which provide dignity and hope for millions of Palestine refugees across the region. Those services will be essential in the reconstruction and stabilization phase.

We reiterate our unwavering commitment to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on the two-State solution. We will actively support and engage with international partners on concrete, irreversible steps towards the two-State solution by reviving a political process to that end.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cabo Verde.

Ms. Romualdo (Cabo Verde): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the members of the Community of Portuguese-speaking countries (CPLP), namely, Angola, Brazil, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Portugal, Sao Tome and Principe, Timor-Leste in my own country, Cabo Verde. We would like to thank the Algerian presidency for convening this timely and important briefing.

We express deep concern about the implementation of the legislation adopted by the Israeli Parliament that threatens to severely hinder the operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

in the occupied Palestinian territory, which will take place at any moment. The CPLP expresses its staunch support for UNRWA and its mandate, established more than 75 years ago by the General Assembly, to alleviate the unresolved question of Palestine refugees. Its mandate is legal and valid and continues to be critical to provide Palestinians with essential humanitarian services, such as health and education.

We express our deep concern over the fate of millions of refugees in the occupied Palestinian territory. Those living in the Gaza Strip have virtually nothing left beyond the Agency's capacity to provide humanitarian aid. The Palestinians in the West Bank have been enduring settlement expansion, intimidation, arbitrary violence and detention and the demolition of property, among other ordeals.

In that context, we underline the widespread consensus that UNRWA is indispensable and irreplaceable in its role assisting the Palestinian refugees, particularly when they need it most. Banning UNRWA from operating in the occupied Palestinian territory would entail tragic consequences and cancel the hopes of hundreds of thousands of children in terms of access to education after 15 months of relentless bombing in the Gaza Strip. It would exacerbate tensions in an already unstable political environment and hamper, furthermore, the possibility of reaching a diplomatic solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We therefore reiterate our appeal to Israel to freeze the implementation of such laws, including in East Jerusalem, allow the movement of UNRWA local staff in the occupied Palestinian territory, continue the deconfliction of UNRWA installations in Gaza and the West Bank and allow UNRWA to continue importing aid assistance into the West Bank and Gaza. We urge all parties to resume a political dialogue with a view to implementing the two-State solution.

The CPLP supports the ceasefire in Gaza, and we expect it to hold permanently. It is high time to go back to the path of diplomacy and seek political solutions for the underlying causes of the conflict. The Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries calls for the Security Council to act on this matter and to protect UNRWA, maintaining its privileges and immunities. UNRWA's fate must be intertwined with the final political solution for the Palestinian question, in line with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Ms. Jóhannsdóttir (Iceland): I thank you, Mr. President, for calling this meeting on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), an issue of urgency and importance. Allow me to also thank Mr. Lazzarini and Mr. Egeland for their input this morning.

The long-awaited ceasefire in Gaza is an opportunity — in the short term to bring urgent humanitarian aid and in the longer term to help Palestinians rebuild their lives after nearly a year and a half of a devastating war. Gaza has been left in ruins. Most homes and businesses are destroyed. Ground water is seriously polluted. Schools have been turned into emergency shelters, and hospitals flattened. Reconstruction will be a mammoth task. We, the international community, have failed the people of Gaza, especially the children of Gaza, for more than a year. Those who have survived are losing their second school year in a row. We must not fail them again.

We welcome the rapid engagement by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as the swift deployment of aid, with more than 5,160 trucks carrying aid in the first eight days following the ceasefire. Some Gazan families can now finally have full rations and three meals a day, as opposed to one bag of flour for the entire month. This is a great improvement, but the humanitarian situation remains precarious. The war has left 2 million people homeless, without an income and fully dependent on food assistance.

Several other United Nations agencies, including UNICEF, the United Nations Office for Project Services and the United Nations Development Programme, are operating and laying out impressive strategies for further assistance and the rebuilding of Gaza. However, these key United Nations agencies and programmes work hand-in-glove with UNRWA. UNRWA's know-how, capabilities and experience is unmatched — so is the level of trust the Agency enjoys with Palestine refugees. No other agency can navigate the field as they can, and therefore UNRWA is a vital partner for any agency that wishes to have an impact.

Under those circumstances, a total halt to the operations of UNRWA, the most centrally placed humanitarian organization responding to the needs of Palestine refugees in the Middle East, will have devastating consequences. Israel must allow UNRWA to operate in the humanitarian space and secure its involvement in a transitional process. Israel, as the occupying Power, has a legal obligation to ensure the well-being of civilians in the territory. This includes securing the continuation of education, health and other services beyond the end of this month, when the law takes effect.

Iceland has repeatedly voiced its concerns regarding the Israeli legislation against UNRWA and consistently called for respect of international humanitarian law. At the centre of our concern is the well-being of the population in Gaza. All parties involved, including the Israeli authorities, must take a pragmatic approach in order to ensure the provision of urgent humanitarian aid and the rebuilding of infrastructure and communities for the long term. This includes allowing the unrestricted movement of UNRWA staff, maintaining the deconfliction of UNRWA installations and allowing the continued access of aid that UNRWA has been distributing in the West Bank and Gaza.

The unilateral action against UNRWA also threatens to undermine any prospect of a two-State solution. The Agency has delivered essential services and humanitarian aid under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. The end of its mandate should be a part of a negotiated settlement between the people of Israel and Palestine.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Senegal.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your leadership of the Algerian presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to thank you for having convened this meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, with a focus on the troubled times facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). I would also like to pay a heartfelt tribute to Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini and to all his dedicated staff, who are forced to make the most extreme sacrifices to protect innocent lives. His briefing was informative, in more than one regard, on the uncertain future of the Agency and the growing threat of unprecedented human tragedy in Gaza, should the Agency's mandate be obstructed, and is a remarkable plea for the necessary support we owe to UNRWA.

There is no need to recall the indispensable role of UNRWA and the wide range of health, education, food, shelter and other services it provides to the Palestinian population. In this respect, while my delegation welcomed the ceasefire agreement and the resumption of humanitarian aid supplies, the fact remains that the humanitarian catastrophe is still raging in Gaza as a result of unilateral measures, including attacks on civilians, taken by the Israeli authorities. This regrettable situation is more than worrisome and undermines all confidence in a party to an agreement that is vital for Gazan civilians and the fruit of several months of diplomatic effort.

The Security Council must not fall into the trap of undocumented allegations of a lack of neutrality, which poorly conceal a desire to perpetuate the illegal

practices that have been widely condemned by the peace-loving and justice-loving international community. It is more urgent than ever for the Security Council to live up to its responsibility to, on the one hand, scrupulously enforce the ceasefire agreement and, on the other, demand that Israel respect international humanitarian law and withdraw all unilateral measures aimed at preventing the implementation of UNRWA's mandate. It is both a legal obligation and a moral duty to prevent a dangerous precedent being set that could threaten all United Nations entities and missions worldwide. The United Nations would lose the guarantee of being able to carry out its mandates anywhere.

Above all, it would mean withdrawing humanitarian aid from the Palestinian populations of Jerusalem and the West Bank at a time when they need it most and undoing more than 75 years of joint humanitarian work and sacrifice. The unanimous political support of all Member States and the voluntary contributions to the Agency's budget are an endorsement by the international community of the continuation of UNRWA's mandate, which sustains the hopes of peace and reconstruction for these populations, who have endured and lost everything.

In conclusion, my delegation demands that the precautionary measures decreed by the International Court of Justice in its various decisions be implemented and calls on the international community to work for a permanent ceasefire and to defend UNRWA in order to better protect the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The meeting rose at 3.20 p.m.