

Role of The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (Unrwa) in the Israel-Palestine Conflict: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

UNRWA is a neutral humanitarian agency of the United Nations, established in 1949, initially for a brief period, to specifically provide assistance and relief to the Palestinian refugees following “The 1948 Nakba”. However, considering escalating subsequent conflicts between Israel and Palestine as well as the need to address rapid and increasing poverty and unemployment, while protecting the rights of the Palestinian refugees and ensuring their holistic development, UNRWA over the years has progressively broadened its mandate to provide services like emergency programmes, relief & social services, healthcare, education, infrastructure development, camp improvement and microfinance and microenterprise programmes. Hence, this highlights UNRWA’s indelibly crucial role; as it was and is the sole agency offering humanitarian assistance and services to Palestinian refugees for almost 76 years now.

Keywords: UNRWA, Nakba, Israel, Palestine, Refugee, Relief, Education, Healthcare.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To understand and critically analyze the role of UNRWA over the years in Israel-Palestine conflict.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper adopts a qualitative study as its research approach and relies on secondary sources for its data. To acquire credible information, the researcher has referred to published journal articles and a range of websites (mainly of the United Nations) on the internet. No primary sources were used for this study.

THE HISTORICAL CHAIN OF EVENTS LEADING TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY (UNRWA)

1. “Zionism” demanding the creation of the Jewish ancient homeland “Israel” in Palestine

The present-day ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine can be traced back to the late 19th century, which originated from the demands of “Zionism” led by its founder Theodor Herzl, which arose in Europe as a Jewish political nationalist movement. This movement advocated for the creation of an independent Jewish state in their ancient homeland, “Israel”, which was then a part of “Palestine” under the Ottoman Empire (1517–1918), for the Jewish populace, who had been the victims of the then increasing religious and racial antisemitism. It’s significant to note that Jews didn’t have a unified country or a homeland because of the repetitive invasions of foreign empires in Israel like Assyrian Empire in 722 BC,

Babylonian Empire in 598 BC, Persian empire in 539 BC, Roman empire in 63 BC and Ottoman Empire in 1517 AD; these repetitive invasions led to the displacement and deportation of the Jews from their homeland “Israel” to other parts of the world mainly due to religious and racial antisemitism against the Jews.

2. “The Balfour Declaration, 1917” and “The 1939 British White Paper”

However, during the First World War (1914-1918), the Ottoman Empire which was a part of “The Central Powers” was defeated by “The Allied Nations” resulting in the loss of control over Palestine. Thus, this led to the rule of the British Empire in Palestine in 1917. Moreover, the British Government with the objective of garnering support from the influential Jewish community in the USA and USSR governments for the war effort and to ensure control over Palestine for British imperialistic interests, considered the Zionist leaders pressing claim of “historical connection” since their ancestors had lived in Palestine two thousand years earlier before dispersing in the “Diaspora” and expressed its support for the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine by issuing “The Balfour Declaration” in 1917. But in this declaration, it was clearly stated that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country”¹.

Furthermore, the League of Nations in 1922, following the defeat of the Central powers in the war and the San Remo Conference in 1920 declared Palestine to be under British mandate regardless of the population’s wishes. Hence, this enabled the immigration of Jews to Palestine; further enabling them to purchase lands from Arab landlords and establish their settlements there. This was perceived by the Arab inhabitants of Palestine as an infringement of their natural rights and a violation of the promise of independence made to the Arab leaders by the Britishers in exchange for their support during the war. This eventually led to the demands of the Arabs in Palestine for independence and a violent revolt against the Jewish immigrants in Palestine from 1936-1939. However, this resistance was successfully suppressed by the British Military with the support of the Jewish paramilitary group “Haganah”; while other Jewish paramilitary groups “Irgun” and “LEHI” didn’t support the British but they performed violent attacks on both the Palestinian Arabs as well as the British authorities.

The British Government issued “The White Paper of 1939” on Palestine which restricted Jewish immigrants and land purchases by them in Palestine as well as rejected the Peel Commission’s plan of partition and assured the existence of an independent Palestine in 10 forthcoming years. In response to “The White Paper”, the Zionist organizations in the US advocated for the adoption of “The Biltmore Program” at the Zionist conference of 1942, which demanded “The Jewish Commonwealth” in Palestine and absolute removal of restrictions on Jewish immigration; thereby rejecting “The 1939 White Paper”.

3. The rejection of the partition proposal in the aftermath of the Second World War

During the Second World War (1939-1945), the holocaust or the genocide of about 6 million Jews in Germany (a member state of “The Axis Power”) became a factor of mass immigration of the Jews to Palestine. In February 1947, taking note of constant conflict and instability, the British proposed the renunciation of its mandate on Palestine; to this the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) considering the aspects of demography, geography, economic and religious interests (holy sites) issued a report to the General Assembly with plans for partition and in November, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution 181(II) which called to divide Palestine into an independent Jewish State having

¹University of Delaware, <https://www1.udel.edu/History-old/figal/Hist104/assets/pdf/readings/14balfour.pdf>.

55% of the country's land with the Jewish populace's dominance and an independent Arab State having 44% of the country's land with Arab populace's dominance and only Jerusalem (the remaining 1%) under the trusteeship of UN considering the region's religious significance for Judaism, Islam and Christianity. This proposal was accepted by the Jews but rejected by the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab League.

4. "The Deri Yassin Massacre, 1948"

This rejection led to the occurrence of "Deir Yassin (a village near Jerusalem) Massacre" on 9th April 1948; wherein the Jewish paramilitary groups, Irgun/The National Military Organization (also, declared as terrorist organizations) with the help of Haganah's provision of cover fire performed barbaric atrocities like stripping, lining up, photographing and then slaughtering or bombing civilians, etc; causing the death of about 250 Arab Palestinian men, women and children.

5. The independence of Israel and "The 1948 Nakba" or "The 1948 Arab-Israeli War"

On 15th May 1948, the British formally terminated its mandate over Palestine and the Jews declared the existence of their independent state "Israel". This led to a full-fledged war between Israel and the Arab states, viz., Syria, Transjordan (Jordan), Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq; wherein the Arab states invaded the territory of Israel or former Palestine. This war is called "The 1948 Arab-Israeli War". This war ended on 10th March, 1949 with Israel emerging to be victorious by covering 77% of the country, except West Bank under the control of Jordan and Gaza Strip under Egypt's control. Furthermore, Israel became a member nation of the UN with a consensus majority, adopting the UN General Assembly 273 resolution, on 11th May, 1949.² But as a coin has two sides, this war led to the mass dispossession and displacement of about 7,50,000 Palestinian Arabs; hence, the Arabs referring the war as "The 1948 Nakba (Arabic for 'catastrophe')".³

6. The establishment of UNRWA

The UN General Assembly first acknowledged the dire humanitarian situation of the refugees by establishing the UN Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR) on November 19th 1948, through UN General Assembly Resolution 212 (III)⁴ with the sole objective of providing emergency aid or relief to the Palestinian refugees in coordination with other UN, multilateral, and voluntary organizations. However, considering the Economic Survey Mission's (ESM) recommendation "The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA)" was established as a neutral humanitarian agency through the UN General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) on 8th December 1949, overtaking UNRPR, as the mandate of UNRWA was broadened providing direct relief and works programme to the Palestinian refugees by collaborating with the local governments. However, UNRWA started its operations from May 1950.⁵

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

1. About UNRWA

UNRWA as a UN agency with a humanitarian mandate aiming to assist and protect Palestine refugees operates on the four principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and operational independence.⁶ Its operational definition of Palestine refugees is "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result

²United Nations, The Question of Palestine, <https://www.un.org/unispal/history/>.

³United Nations, *History of The Question of Palestine*, The Question of Palestine, <https://www.un.org/unispal/history/>.

⁴United Nations, The Question of Palestine, <https://www.un.org/unispal/history/>.

⁵UNRWA, General Assembly Resolution 302 (Dec. 8, 1949), <https://www.unrwa.org/content/general-assembly-resolution-302>.

⁶UNRWA, UNRWA, <https://www.unrwa.org/humanitarian-principles>.

of the 1948 conflict.”⁷ UNRWA has 2 headquarters, located in Amman and Gaza City. Moreover, it has liaison offices in Brussels, Cairo, New York and Washington. Furthermore, it maintains an office in each of its five areas of operation, viz., the West Bank (inclusive of East Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip and the host countries- Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.⁸ UNRWA services are available to all those living in its area of operations who meet the supra definition, who are registered with the Agency and who need assistance. The descendants of Palestine refugee males, including adopted children, are also eligible for registration to avail the services.⁹ Moreover, considering subsequent conflicts, the mandate has been extended to “1967 and subsequent hostilities” in 2008.¹⁰ The UN General Assembly made the mandate of UNRWA to be subjected to periodical renewal of 3 years each to cater and meet the evolving essential needs of the Palestinian refugees. Thus, since the establishment of UNRWA, its mandate has been extended and most recently it has been extended till 30th June, 2026.¹¹

2. Organizational structure of UNRWA

1. **Commissioner-General-** Appointed by the UN Secretary-General¹², is the chief officer who leads UNRWA and is obligated to directly report to the UN General Assembly. Currently, Philippe Lazzarini is the Commissioner-General.
2. **Deputy Commissioner General-** Currently, there are 2 Deputy Commissioner-General, namely, Antonia De Meo (Operational Support) and Natalie Boucly (Programmes and Partnerships).¹³
3. **Executive Office (EO)-** Its area of work includes UNRWA’s vision and direction, organizational design, governance and decision-making, policy and practice, operational oversight, internal stakeholder engagement and advocacy & external stakeholder engagement. Also, it overlooks the 5 field offices, 4 liaison offices, programmes of HQ, the supporting departments and is mainly responsible for providing support to the Commissioner-General and Deputies Commissioner-General in executive planning, formulation, and coordination of all facets of UNRWA management. Thus, it facilitates collaboration across the Agency by overseeing high-level strategic decision-making, driving and maintaining organizational transformation as well as controlling a variety of risks and delicate issues arising from the internal and external environments.¹⁴
4. **Advisory Committee-** It came into existence as a result of the UN Resolution 302 (IV) on 8th December, 1949. It’s responsible for advising and assisting the Commissioner-General of UNRWA in carrying out the Agency’s mandate. It consists of 29 Members which includes Israel and 4 Observer states, viz., Palestine (since 2012), European Union, League of Arab States and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).¹⁵

⁷UNRWA, UNRWA (2022), https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/UNRWAFACETSHEET_150922.pdf.

⁸UNRWA, UNRWA, <https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are/organizational-structure>.

⁹UNRWA, Palestine refugees, <https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>.

¹⁰UNRWA, *UNRWA AND THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEES: A HISTORY WITHIN HISTORY*, UNRWA AND THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEES (May 31, 2010), <https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/201006109359.pdf>.

¹¹United Nations, UN General Assembly Renews UNRWA Mandate (Dec. 14, 2022), <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/news-releases/un-general-assembly-renews-unrwa-mandate>.

¹²UNRWA, UNRWA Commissioner-General, <https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are/our-leadership/unrwa-commissioner-general>.

¹³UNRWA, UNRWA, <https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are/organizational-structure>.

¹⁴UNRWA, UNRWA, <https://www.unrwa.org/executive-office>.

¹⁵UNRWA, UNRWA, <https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are/advisory-commission/members-advisory-commission>.

3. Role of UNRWA

Primary healthcare, relief and education programmes were part of UNRWA's original mandate (during the first six years); however, it has progressively broadened and now encompasses:

1. Emergency programmes-

Through phases of prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery, the Agency develops emergency and contingency response plans in close collaboration with UN country staff in host nations (Syria and OPT)¹⁶. These procedures typically last only a short time. Long-lasting humanitarian crises, however, might necessitate a consistent assistance effort. UNRWA offers food assistance, water, sanitation, emergency healthcare services, emergency education, monetary support, jobs, and temporary shelter and reconstruction when the homes of refugees are destroyed or damaged.¹⁷

2. Relief and Social Services-

The Agency's assistance to the most vulnerable has changed throughout time, moving from the emergency delivery of food aid and other basic humanitarian relief to initiatives that protect the rights and promote the socioeconomic empowerment of the destitute Palestine refugees. Currently, aid consists of monetary subsidies, food assistance, rehabilitation programs, and skill training. Additionally, the Agency's dedication to defending the rights of Palestine refugees depends heavily on community partnerships. The Agency has collaborated with community-based groups since 1989 to address the needs of the most vulnerable, such as women and children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.¹⁸ As of 2022, nearly 398,044 refugees have availed relief and social services.¹⁹

3. Healthcare-

The cornerstone of healthcare assistance for refugees is provided by the Agency's network of 138 primary healthcare centers and mobile clinics, which offer affordable preventive, general medical, and specialized care services catered to each stage of life. The Agency also strives to guarantee a healthy living environment for Palestine refugees in the 58 recognized camps, adhering to WHO guidelines. From responding to airborne and waterborne infection outbreaks after the first refugee camps were established to fighting widespread child malnutrition and lowering infant and maternal mortality, healthcare services for refugees have changed significantly over time. Today, they also address chronic non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and cancer in addition to fighting communicable diseases.²⁰

The medical teams offer ongoing, all-encompassing, patient-centric care. Perinatal care, infant and child care, adolescent and adult care, and active ageing are among the healthcare services offered by UNRWA. Even during the extraordinary global health catastrophe that is COVID-19, from distance-learning to enhancing and modifying healthcare services, UNRWA has worked relentlessly to deliver essential life-saving services to Palestine refugees throughout its areas of operation.²¹ UNRWA has truly acted as a lifeline and a lifesaver for Palestinian refugees. As of 2022, healthcare included more than 7 million annual patient visits.²²

4. Education-

Education has always been seen by the Palestine refugee community as the route to a better future.

¹⁶UNRWA, UNRWA (2022), https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/UNRWAFACETSHEET_150922.pdf.

¹⁷UNRWA, about unrwa, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/about_unrwa.pdf.

¹⁸UNRWA, about unrwa, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/about_unrwa.pdf.

¹⁹UNRWA, UNRWA (2022), https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/UNRWAFACETSHEET_150922.pdf.

²⁰UNRWA, about unrwa, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/about_unrwa.pdf.

²¹UNRWA, about unrwa, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/about_unrwa.pdf.

²²UNRWA, UNRWA (2022), https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/UNRWAFACETSHEET_150922.pdf.

Palestinians are among the most educated populations in the Middle East, despite their frequently challenging conditions. UNRWA has played a significant role in this accomplishment by helping to educate three generations of refugees, and the organization continues to provide this service today. For almost 50 years, UNRWA has been the primary supplier of basic education to Palestine refugees, running one of the biggest school systems in the Middle East. All Palestine refugee children in the Agency's operational region get free basic and junior secondary education. The UNRWA vocational training facilities offer technical and vocational training courses.²³

In 2001, UNRWA changed its admissions policy at its Education Science Faculty in Jordan, which provides pre-service teacher training that leads to a first-level university degree. To encourage gender parity in the faculty, 50% of the seats were given to eligible Palestine refugee women. The first residential women's vocational training center in the Middle East was founded in 1962 on the West Bank by UNRWA, which was a pioneer in technical and vocational training. Additionally, it has guaranteed women that UNRWA strives to provide Palestine refugee students with a foundational education on par with that offered in regional government schools, ensuring that they have equal access to educational and employment prospects. As a result, UNRWA schools follow the same texts and curricula as the host government/authority schools, and students take national exams when appropriate. Additionally, the Agency gives university scholarships to eligible refugee youngsters and conducts a comprehensive teacher-training program.²⁴ As of 2022, UNRWA has provided education for approximately 5,44,710 students in 706 schools and to +7,930 vocational training students.²⁵

5. Infrastructure development-

To prevent outbreaks of waterborne illnesses like cholera, hepatitis, and diarrhea and to create a safe and healthy urban environment for Palestine refugees, the Agency works with host authorities to guarantee access to safe drinking water through vast water-supply networks. Sewerage systems, waste management services, storm-water drainage, and rodent control services stop the spread of diseases associated with inadequate sanitation and hygiene. Electrical infrastructure, access roads, and walkway networks are also maintained.²⁶

6. Camp improvement-

The refugees just like anyone have the right to a decent standard of living, including housing. The 58 recognized refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip are home to almost one-third of the approximately 5 million Palestine refugees who are registered with UNRWA. The camps have evolved over time from tentative “tent cities” into extremely crowded, multistory buildings with pockets of acute poverty and overpopulation. Several of the camps are regarded as some of the world's densest metropolitan areas. Due to budgetary limitations and the demands of an expanding refugee population, inferior and overcrowded housing is a serious issue in the fields of operation of UNRWA. As a result, upgrading the gravely inadequate shelters for the most vulnerable refugees is given top priority. 500 inadequate shelters in Jordan alone have been designated for immediate improvement. In accordance with their national, regional, and local policies, host governments collaborate with UNRWA to address basic housing requirements. Nonetheless, the active involvement of refugee groups in setting priorities for

²³United Nations, *Evolution of UNRWA's mandate to Palestine refugees – Statement of Commissioner-General*, The Question of Palestine (Sept. 21, 2003), <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-208942/>.

²⁴United Nations, *Evolution of UNRWA's mandate to Palestine refugees – Statement of Commissioner-General*, The Question of Palestine (Sept. 21, 2003), <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-208942/>.

²⁵UNRWA, UNRWA (2022), https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/UNRWAFACETSHEET_150922.pdf.

²⁶UNRWA, about unrwa, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/about_unrwa.pdf.

improvements increases their sense of control over the process of development. Additionally, it supports the development of abilities and skills in the construction industry and related professional trades.²⁷

7. Microfinance and Microenterprise Programme (MMP):

UNRWA started its MMP in the OPT in June 1991. This initiative was developed in response to the rapidly worsening economic conditions that followed from Gulf war the start of the first intifada in 1987, which marked the high unemployment and expanding poverty.²⁸ Currently, UNRWA offers Palestine refugees and other underprivileged or marginalized communities that reside and work nearby with income-generation opportunities by providing credit and associated financial services to:

Families-

- **Consumer Loan Product (CPL)**- personal loan for working-class families without bank credit that allows them to recoup assets sold to fund household expenses like as weddings and funerals or to deal with unemployment or illness.
- **Housing Loan Product (HLP)**- A loan to assist families that are unable to get mortgage facilities in upgrading, expanding, or purchasing a home.²⁹

Women-

- **Solidarity Group Lending (SGL)**- A loan for groups of women entrepreneurs who are collectively responsible for repayment which sustains enterprise, as well as household spending on education, health and basic needs.
- **Women's Household Credit (WHC)**- This loan enables women to work from home and accumulate household assets for business purposes.³⁰

Youth-

Mubadarati or Youth Start-up Loan (YSL)-

- The region's first youth start-up loan program, available to young men and women between the ages of 18 and 30, enables them to launch new companies that generate jobs for themselves and others.³¹

Small business-

- **Microenterprise credit (MEC)**- The vast majority of regional companies with fewer than five employees are the aim of this product; these companies are typically shock-prone and lack formal credit. MEC loans, which range from \$300 to \$8,500, assist companies in accumulating and preserving short-term working capital buffers.
- **Microenterprise credit plus (MEC+)**- Successful small firms frequently need bigger loans with longer payback periods as they grow in order to keep increasing their capital and creating jobs. The Agency offers MEC+ loans to more formal businesses and borrowers who have proven their ability to repay loans across three loan cycles in order to meet this demand.
- **Small and medium enterprise business training (SMET)**- Small business proprietors in the Gaza Strip can receive specialised training from UNRWA in areas including accounting, taxes, computer

²⁷UNRWA, about unrwa, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/about_unrwa.pdf.

²⁸ United Nations, *Evolution of UNRWA's mandate to Palestine refugees – Statement of Commissioner-General*, The Question of Palestine (Sept. 21, 2003), <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-208942/>.

²⁹UNRWA, about unrwa, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/about_unrwa.pdf.

³⁰Ibid

³¹Ibid

skills, and online sales. Participants pay for each course's direct expenses, with donor funds covering any remaining overhead.

- **Small-scale enterprise lending (SSE)**- With a range of US\$ 3,000 to US\$ 75,000, the loans are quite big and usually assist market expansion, modernisation, and capital expenditure.³²

These investments lessen poverty, support and generate jobs, and enable refugees to take charge of their own development. The Agency's financial services follow industry best practices and international standards for microfinance. Poor metropolitan areas, which are hubs of business and industry and are home to a large number of Palestine refugees, are the focus of outreach initiatives. The goal of providing financial services is to be sustainable while maintaining reasonable interest rates that are comparable to those of other microfinance companies.³³

4. Alleged claims of Israel about UNRWA post HAMAS- Israel War of 2023 and its aftermath

UNRWA's funds allow it to carry out operations and offer assistance to Palestinian refugees. UNRWA's funding is almost entirely dependent on "voluntary contributions" or grants from its member nations, with some coming from the UN budget. However, following the October 2023 "Gaza War", Israel allegedly claimed that UNRWA's 12 employees engaged in activities that aided HAMAS, that UNRWA hired 190 HAMAS and Jihad militants³⁴ and that UNRWA gave its facilities (schools, shelters, etc) as bases for HAMAS's military operations allowing them to conceal their weapons there in order to launch attacks on Israel³⁵ and spread extremist ideologies against Israel in UNRWA-run schools to perpetuate violence³⁶.

As a result, numerous nations, most notably the US and the EU, ceased the funds for UNRWA. Following an investigation, UNRWA dismissed 9 staff members³⁷. After some time and dialogue, some nations eventually lifted the ban and reinstated the funds; also, some increased the amounts³⁸. Contrasting this, Israel stopped providing aid to Gaza in an effort to persuade HAMAS to agree to a revised ceasefire agreement. Saudi Arabia referred to Israel's action as "a tool of extortion", while Egypt accused Israel of using "starvation as a weapon" in "a flagrant and clear violation of humanitarian law"³⁹. UNRWA has also published "Claims versus Facts" in response to these claims⁴⁰. UNRWA faced difficulties operating as a result of these allegations and the conflicting responses of nations worldwide. Notwithstanding these events, UNRWA has maintained the provision of services in compliance with its mandate.

³²Ibid

³³Ibid

³⁴Peter Beaumont, *What is Unrwa and why has Israel's parliament voted to ban it?*, the Guardian (Oct. 28, 2024), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/28/what-is-unrwa-and-why-has-israels-parliament-voted-to-ban-it>.

³⁵UNRWA, <https://www.unrwa.org/unrwa-claims-versus-facts-2025>.

³⁶*Israel Yet to Provide Proof for Allegations That UNRWA Staff Backs Terror Outfits*, The Wire, <https://thewire.in/world/israel-yet-to-provide-proof-for-allegations-that-unrwa-staff-backs-terror-outfits>.

³⁷Peter Beaumont, *What is Unrwa and why has Israel's parliament voted to ban it?*, the Guardian (Oct. 28, 2024), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/28/what-is-unrwa-and-why-has-israels-parliament-voted-to-ban-it>.

³⁸UPDATED: *List of Countries Suspending and Reinstating UNRWA Funding - UN Watch*, UN Watch (May 26, 2024), <https://unwatch.org/updated-list-of-countries-suspending-unwra-funding/>.

³⁹*Outrage as Israel cuts off Gaza aid to pressure Hamas to accept a new ceasefire proposal*, The Hindu (Mar. 3, 2025), <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/outrage-as-israel-cuts-off-gaza-aid-to-pressure-hamas-to-accept-a-new-ceasefire-proposal/article69283162.ece>.

⁴⁰UNRWA, <https://www.unrwa.org/unrwa-claims-versus-facts-2025>.

CONCLUSION

1. UNRWA is not responsible for the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict

UNRWA is a neutral humanitarian agency and not a political agency. In compliance with internationally agreed goals and standards, the Agency offers Palestine refugees in its operational fields a range of vital services and humanitarian assistance that enable them to achieve full potential in human development notwithstanding the adverse circumstances they encounter. Hence, resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict is not a part of its mandate but is rather the onus of the parties to the conflict and other political actors like the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) which was established by The UN General Assembly Resolution 194(III) to settle the Israel-Palestine dispute and according to paragraph 11 of the supra resolution⁴¹, it was to implement “the right to return” of Palestinian refugees to their homes and compensate those who return but have lost their property; however, it failed to achieve its purpose.

2. UNRWA is a unique neutral humanitarian agency of the UN

Founded in 1949 specifically for the benefit of Palestinian refugees, UNRWA is a neutral one-of-a-kind humanitarian organization that has continued to operate and perform vital tasks for refugees ever since. Since its founding, the Agency has been instrumental in providing crucial services for the protection, human development and well-being of Palestine refugees. It currently employs about 30,000 people (the majority themselves being refugees⁴²), operates in five fields, has 58 refugee camps, has successfully implemented emergency programmes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Syria; currently, serving about 5 million refugees and other registered refugees. In contrast to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which was founded in 1950 as the primary agency to assist all other refugees worldwide, UNRWA operates solely in a particular region or conflict, making it a unique agency and one of the largest programmes of the UN. Although UNHCR's mandate includes Palestinians who are refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention, which may include Palestine refugees as defined by UNRWA., UNHCR can only take up the cause of Palestinian refugees when they are outside UNRWA's operational boundaries.

3. The eventual evolution of UNRWA’s mandate has made its role indelibly crucial

UNRWA was established in 1949 for a tentative period with the sole aim of providing assistance and relief to the Palestinian refugees post-1948 Nakba. However, after considering the situation at the time and the inability of the parties to the conflict to reach a peaceful agreement, as well as escalating subsequent Israel-Palestine conflicts over the years; UNRWA progressively expanded its scope of humanitarian services to include reintegrating the refugees into the local economy, protecting their human rights by offering them “soft protection” during intifadas, and ensuring their development by providing services that meet international standards. Even the Oslo Accords signed by Israel-Palestine marked some progress but yet again no solution came out of it. Moreover, the most recent “Gaza War” of October 2023 makes it evident that the Israel-Palestine conflict is yet unresolved. As the only organization offering services to Palestinian refugees for almost 76 years, the role of UNRWA has been indelibly crucial as it was and is the sole agency providing direct relief to Palestinian refugees.

4. UNRWA- Representing both, failure and success of International Organizations

UNRWA was established as a short-term solution to a short-term need. However, yet, UNRWA is the only contemporary solution due to the lack of a just and pending solution for the predicament of Palestinian

⁴¹United Nations, Welcome to the United Nations, <https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ARES194III.pdf>.

⁴²UNRWA, about unrwa, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/about_unrwa.pdf.

refugees.⁴³ It's a failure due to the inability to execute a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine post "The 1948 Nakba", Israel's refusal to repatriate the refugees, the host countries' refusal to integrate or acknowledge them and the international community's rejection of resettlement; making UNRWA the sole remedy. On the contrary, it's a success because of its capacity to offer both immediate relief and long-term humanitarian assistance while concurrently protecting the rights of the refugees and offering them essential services; thus, providing some degree of security and stability.

⁴³Muhammad Awawdeh, *UNRWA: An Indispensable Agency*, Scholarship at UWindsor (Oct. 2020), <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/major-papers/144/>.