



Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association [Charity No. 1155620]
23rd January 2025

Reference:- United Nations Relief Works Agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA)

Dear

We write to ask you urgently to transmit this letter, with your comments, to the Foreign Secretary.

On 28 October 2024, Israel's Parliament passed two Bills banning the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) from operating in Israel and instituted a "no contact" policy with the Agency. If implemented by Israel's Government when they come into effect on 30 January, in 9 days' time, UNRWA will be obliged to halt its work throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). These actions will only serve to compound what is already a humanitarian catastrophe on the OPTs; UNRWA is the essential lifeline for humanitarian aid to Gaza, as well as providing essential education, health and social services to Palestinian refugees in the West Bank.

As residents of Oxford and its surrounding areas, we feel we have a particular duty to the rights of the Palestinian people due to the twinning between the city of Oxford and the city of Ramallah in the West Bank. The Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA) has long functioned as the unofficial representative of this twinning, forging links between British citizens and Palestinians. This twinning has led to years of information and cultural exchange as well as a friendship that greatly transcends politics.

In the summer of 2023, a delegation of Palestinians from the UNRWA-supported Al Am'ari Refugee Camp in Ramallah Municipality visited Oxford. The group included women and children of all ages and leaders from the Women's Centre who, since first working together with ORFA in 2005, have formed deep, lifelong bonds with the citizens of Oxfordshire. The visit included a week of exhibitions, art, discussions, presentations and interviews.

Through this visit ORFA has come to fully understand just how essential the support provided by UNWRA is to the Al Am'ari refugee camp and the people of Ramallah. It is crucial for schooling, healthcare, and developing women's arts and skills through, for instance, the Tatreez traditional Palestinian embroidery workshops which provides employment. The Camp is the beating heart of the city and a home to 15,315 people.

Losing essential UNRWA funding and operations will put lives, and livelihoods, at risk not just within the camp, but within the wider governorate of Ramallah and Al Bireh. In the Al Am'ari Camp there are 4,527 children between the ages of 0-18 who attend one of the two UNRWA schools.

This same story is echoed throughout the West Bank where there are nineteen UNRWA supported Refugee Camps. In the West Bank alone UNRWA records 871,000 registered refugees, 250,000 of whom live in the Camps and are reliant on these essential services such as education and housing. There are also UNRWA supported camps for Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

On a global stage, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has been outspoken in ordering Israel to facilitate humanitarian aid to both Gaza and the West Bank. The ICJ order of 28 March 2024 specifically required Israel to ensure the delivery of urgently needed assistance in cooperation with the United Nations. Banning UNRWA would directly violate these measures. Israel, as the occupying power, bears responsibility for the welfare of Palestinian refugees under international humanitarian law. So long as the occupation is in place, there is a responsibility for all to act to protect those living in the occupied territory. As the UN Secretary General António Guterres noted in his letters to the Security Council and General Assembly of 9 December 2024, if UNRWA is obliged to cease its work in the OPT, Israel will have the legal obligation to maintain those services. Thus, the British Government must emphasise that providing humanitarian aid and services to the Palestinians is not a choice for the Israelis, but an obligation on them.

In light of all this, we emphasise how crucial our government's position is. Foreign Secretary David Lammy's recurrent trips to Israel are indicative of a bias towards the Israeli people, especially when done so in an unofficial capacity. We emphasise Britain's historic role in the current plight of the Palestinian people and therefore recognise a responsibility to advocate for them. This must come in the form of making desperate efforts to dissuade the Government of Israel from implementing the laws intended, with the threat of serious consequences for our bilateral relations if Israel continues to ignore the message. Repeatedly engaging in unreported trips to Israel does not come near to helping to address the seriousness of the situation for the Palestinian people.

Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association asks that this one-sided perspective be translated into some tangible action in support of Palestinians' human rights and a change of attitude within government. We urge you to write to the Foreign Secretary and unequivocally demand that the UK Government does all within its power to stop the Government of Israel from implementing this inhumane law.

Yours sincerely,

N. Marriott (ORFA secretary)

On behalf of the Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association Trustees and Committee