

UNRWA Appropriations

May 23, 2019

Background

Last year, the United States withheld over \$300 million in funds from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) under the notion that the funds would not be reinstated until Palestine agreed to renew peace talks. UNRWA works in highly vulnerable areas to help feed the poor, educate children, and provide access to healthcare. One million Palestinians in Gaza alone survive on the food provided by the agency. Furthermore, the agency runs about 700 schools for 500,000 children in Gaza, West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.

Due to fiscal cuts, last month UNRWA had to cut 154 people from their program in the West Bank and 113 in Gaza; additionally, 580 individuals were moved to part-time employment. The job cuts caused unrest in Gaza where many people depend on their UNRWA employment to provide for their families. This decision by the United States to cut such a large amount of funding has made an already intolerable situation much worse.

UNRWA is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to provide assistance and protection to registered Palestine Refugees. The main priorities of 2019 for UNRWA are:

- Educating 535,000 boys and girls in 715 schools
- Providing vocational and technical training to 8,000 refugee youth
- Providing primary health care to 3.5 million refugees through 147 health clinics
- Distributing food to more than 1 million refugees in Gaza
- Providing cash assistance to 450,000 Palestine refugees inside Syria, Lebanon and Jordan
- Providing social safety net to more than 250,000 refugees who are in need of food
- Extending over 48,000 microfinance loans to men, women, and youth
- Delivering support to refugees with disabilities

Action

Organizations, including UNRWA, are making calls to the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Subcommittee to include in the Fiscal Year 2020 bill to enact not less than \$360 million from the Migration and Refugee Account be obligated to UNRWA and \$224 million in the Economic Support Funds be obligated for assistance to the West Bank and Gaza.

Critics of Congress' decision argue that this funding is for critical life-saving services to vulnerable populations. In addition, the enactment of this funding will help promote the prospects for peace in the region. The decision to withhold funds inhibits Palestinians from getting to the negotiating table and exacerbates the security and humanitarian challenges already facing the region.

The funding provided critical food security, education, emergency healthcare, sanitation and clean water to Palestine. Through reforms and austerity measures, UNRWA was capable of continuing their

operations but there is concern that with no guaranteed funding these efforts may not continue in the future.

Suggested Language

For necessary expenses not otherwise provided for, to enable the Secretary of State to carry out the provisions of section 2(a) and (b) of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, and other activities to meet refugee and migration needs; salaries and expenses of personnel and dependents as authorized by the Foreign Service Act of 1980; allowances as authorized by sections 5921 through 5925 of title 5, United States Code; purchase and hire of passenger motor vehicles; and services as authorized by section 3109 of title 5, United States Code, \$2,027,876,000, to remain available until expended, of which not less than \$35,000,000 shall be made available to respond to small-scale emergency humanitarian requirements, ***\$360,000,000 shall be made available for UNRWA within 60 days of enactment***, and \$5,000,000 shall be made available for refugees resettling in Israel.

Sec. 7041

(j) WEST BANK AND GAZA. —

(A) FUNDING. —Of the funds appropriated under titles III and IV of this Act, not less than \$225,000,000 shall be made available for assistance for the West Bank and Gaza, and shall be obligated no later than 60 days after enactment of this Act.

Alternatively:

(4) HUMAN NEEDS.

(A) —Of the funds appropriated by this Act under the heading “Economic Support Fund” not less than \$225,000,000 shall be made available, following consultation with the Committees on Appropriations, for assistance for the West Bank and Gaza to—

(1) implement community-based programs that provide for basic human needs, such as food, water, health, shelter, protection, education, and livelihoods, and that promote peace and development;

(2) support payments to the East Jerusalem Hospital Network

(B) The funding provided in paragraph A shall be obligated no later than 60 days after enactment of this Act.