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A damaged sign is pictured at the headquarters of UNRWA, following an Israeli raid, in Gaza City, on July 12, 2024.

UNRWA involvement in terror

By David Bedein

ON OCTOBER 7, 2023, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) acknowledged the involvement of “some” of its employees in the terrorist attacks executed by Palestinian groups against Jewish communities in the Western Negev, specifically those orchestrated by the Islamic Resistance Movement – Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Al-Mujahideen Battalions, and Martyrs of Al-Aqsa Battalions, among others.

In a statement released on August 5, 2024, Philippe Lazzarini, who has served as UNRWA Commissioner-General since 2020, indicated that an internal investigation carried out by UNRWA, prompted by information received, uncovered details concerning “nine cases [of UNRWA field staff], the evidence – if authenticated and corroborated – could indicate that the UNRWA staff members may have been involved in the attacks of 7 October.”

Based on these findings, Lazzarini wrote: “I have decided that in the case of these remaining nine staff members, they cannot work for UNRWA. All contracts of these staff members will be terminated in the interest of the Agency.”

The statement, although phrased with caution, suggests a potential connection between UNRWA employees and the attack on October 7, which stands in contrast to UNRWA’s established denial policy. An article authored by Lazzarini, released merely five weeks prior to the formal acknowledgment, bore the title: “UNRWA: Stop Israel’s Violent Campaign Against Us.”

In this article, Lazzarini criticized Israel for what he termed “outrageous attacks” on United Nations personnel, facilities, and the operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). He reported that 197 UN staff members lost their lives in Gaza, with nearly 190 UN facilities either damaged or completely destroyed. Additionally, he noted that UNRWA schools were obliterated, and at least 520 Palestinians were killed while seeking refuge in these schools and facilities. Furthermore, he stated that Israeli security forces arrested UN staff, who were reportedly subjected to torture and mistreatment in detention centers.

Lazzarini submitted the article for publication on the Walla website; however, Ariel Shmidberg, the deputy editor-in-chief and

head of the news desk at Walla, declined his request.

Shmidberg provided an explanation for the website’s decision in an article entitled: “The audacity of UNRWA’s CEO - and why his article won’t be published on Walla.” Shmidberg stated:

“We will not endorse a one-sided and overtly biased article, consisting of 655 words in Hebrew, that fails to denounce the horrific massacre perpetrated by Hamas on October 7. We refuse to publish a profoundly hypocritical piece that elaborates on the UNRWA employees who suffered injuries or fatalities during the conflict while neglecting to mention that officials from this organization crossed the border on October 7, alongside their violent terrorist counterparts who brutally murdered innocent Israelis, including children, the elderly, women, and men. A vague assertion about the need for further investigation is wholly inadequate.

We have no intention of disseminating a provocative article that discusses the damage to UNRWA facilities without even hinting at the exploitation of these facilities by Hamas over the years, which continues to this day. There is no reference, for instance, to Hamas’ largest server farm, situated beneath a UNRWA building, nor is there any acknowledgment of UNRWA structures that have served as operational headquarters for terrorists targeting IDF forces in their search for our abducted citizens.

We will not publish an article that addresses UNRWA schools without recognizing that these institutions effectively function as Hamas headquarters, where incitement against Israel occurs, leading students to become recruits for murderous terrorist organizations.”

Israel’s Operation Swords of Iron in the Gaza Strip following the terrorist attack on October 7, 2023, led by the Islamic resistance movement Hamas and Islamic Jihad, revealed the involvement of UNRWA employees in terrorism, the use of its facilities by Palestinian terrorist organizations and the damage to UNRWA facilities.

The following is a detailed account of the information provided by the IDF regarding this matter.

On August 7, 2024, it was reported that in the preceding week, Hamas had fired rockets from launchers situated in close proximity to aid and food distribution centers operated by international organizations, including UNRWA.

On July 25, 2024, Hamas fired multiple rockets from the humanitarian zone located in Khan Yunis, targeting the al-Qarara school operated by UNRWA.

On July 20, 2024, IDF forces searched the UNRWA headquarters in Gaza, where armed Hamas operatives were barricaded, and found weapons, guns, equipment of the Hamas naval commando unit, military vests and intelligence equipment.

On July 16, 2024, utilizing intelligence reports, the Israel Defense Forces conducted an operation against terrorists who were active within a UNRWA school in Nusirat and were orchestrating attacks against IDF personnel from that location.

On July 12, 2024, Israeli Defense Forces identified a tunnel and significant Hamas intelligence apparatus located beneath the UNRWA headquarters in Gaza. A cache of drones, rockets, machine guns, mortars, explosive devices, and hand grenades was discovered within a facility utilized by Hamas and Islamic Jihad in proximity to the UNRWA headquarters in Gaza.

On July 6, 2024, utilizing intelligence reports, the Israeli Air Force conducted strikes against terrorists who were utilizing the facilities of UNRWA's al-Ja'oni school in central Gaza. This location was identified as a refuge and operational base for orchestrating assaults against IDF forces.

On July 4, 2024, the Israeli Air Force conducted operations against terrorists utilizing UNRWA schools in Gaza City, specifically the Al-Qahira school located in Al-Furqan and the Musa school situated in the Darj Tufah neighborhood. It is important to note that these two schools run by the local government and are not affiliated with UNRWA. Hamas exploited these facilities as concealment sites and launch points for assaults on IDF forces.

On June 30, 2024, Israeli Defense Forces discovered numerous weapons, hand grenades, and intelligence documents within a UNRWA school situated in Shejaia. The school had been utilized by Hamas as a concealment site and storage facility.

On June 7, 2024, the Israeli Air Force conducted an operation against terrorists who were utilizing a container located within a UNRWA school in Camp Shatti.

On June 6, 2024, an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) operation targeting terrorists at a UNRWA school in Nusirat resulted in the deaths of at least 17 operatives affiliated with Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Among those killed was Ahmed Shahada Muhammad Abu Mahmar, a mem-



At the UNRWA refugee camp in Deheishe, Bethlehem.

ber of the anti-aircraft unit of the Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas), who had participated in the October 7 attack. Other casualties included Maher Mahmoud Abdel-Fattah Fadel, also from the Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas), Jamil Suleiman Makadama, an operative in the elite unit of the Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas), and Shaheen Mahmoud Abu Al-Sharif, associated with the Al-Quds Brigades (Islamic Jihad). Additionally, Said Muhammad Ahmed Issa, identified as a terrorist, Majd Atef Muhammad Darwish, who served in the air unit of the Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas), Mazen Hassan Aqab Abu Zahar, another operative of the Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas), and Mu'atim Mofid Muhammad Shakra, also affiliated with the Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas), were among those killed.

On May 30, 2024, an anti-tank missile was fired from the premises of a UNRWA school. Upon conducting a search of the school, IDF forces discovered a significant cache of weapons.

On May 14, 2024, an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) drone captured footage of militants moving about and firing from a United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) facility in East Rafah, with UNRWA vehicles observed in proximity to the scene.

On May 5, 2024, the Israeli Air Force conducted an airstrike on the al-Qassam Brigades' headquarters, affiliated with Hamas, located within the UNRWA compound in central Gaza. This facility served as a strategic base for orchestrating assaults against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

On March 5, 2024, the spokesperson for the

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced that over 450 employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) were affiliated with terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip. Among these individuals were those involved in the attack on October 7, including Mahmoud Hussein Ahmed al-Qaq, a UNRWA elementary school teacher and member of the Al-Quds Brigades (Islamic Jihad); Yusuf Zidan Suleiman Al-Khajari, a primary school teacher at UNRWA and operative in the Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas); Rasan Nabil Muhammad Shahada Al-Jabri, a medical center official and activist in the Al-Furqan Brigade of the Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas); and Bakr Mahmoud Abdullah Darwish, a consultant at a UNRWA school and operative in the Al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas). Additionally, the IDF disclosed a recorded conversation involving Yusuf al-Khawajara, a UNRWA teacher, in which he boasted about his participation in the kidnapping of Israeli women, whom he referred to as "sabaya," a term denoting women captives taken for sexual purposes during wartime.

On February 10, 2024, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) discovered a tunnel in proximity to a UNRWA school, which connected to another tunnel situated beneath the UNRWA headquarters in Gaza. This tunnel was reportedly used to supply electricity to a passage utilized by the al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas). A significant cache of weaponry was uncovered within the tunnel, including firearms, ammunition, hand grenades, and explosive devices.

Amir Bohbot, a military reporter for the "Walla" website, disclosed further information

regarding a recent operation:

“On Saturday, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the Shin Bet uncovered a significant asset belonging to Hamas when they discovered a tunnel shaft leading to the central headquarters of UNRWA in the Gaza Strip. The operatives located the shaft adjacent to a school operated by a Palestinian aid agency. This shaft provided access to an underground tunnel equipped with intelligence apparatus, which served as a crucial strategic area for Hamas. Subsequent investigations revealed that the tunnel extends beneath UNRWA’s main building in Gaza.

“The operatives identified an electrical infrastructure within the tunnel that was linked to the UNRWA headquarters, suggesting a direct connection between Hamas and the United Nations organization, which had its resources exploited to support the construction of these terrorist tunnels. The tunnel was constructed to a depth of 18 meters and stretched 700 meters in length, featuring multiple side entrances. A diverse array of intelligence equipment was recovered during the operation. The intelligence gained from this discovery will facilitate further operations against additional Hamas targets.

“The IDF spokesperson stated that the destruction of this tunnel significantly undermines Hamas’s intelligence capabilities. In light of these findings and based on initial intelligence from the Shin Bet, the operatives conducted a raid on UNRWA’s central headquarters, which houses the offices of various humanitarian and international organizations. Numerous weapons were discovered within the offices, including firearms, ammunition, hand grenades, and explosives. Additionally, intelligence equipment and documents were found in the offices of UNRWA officials, indicating that Hamas operatives had also utilized these offices.”

On January 6, 2024, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) confiscated military vests belonging to the elite unit of the al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas), which had been concealed within UNRWA bags at a clinic located in Gaza.

On December 25, 2023, an UNRWA school in Gaza, associated with the activities of the al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas), was discovered to contain numerous explosive devices concealed within UNRWA bags, along with Kalashnikov assault rifles and 15 explosive belts.

On December 11, 2023, Israeli Defense Forces discovered a significant cache of weapons, including firearms, hand grenades,

and ammunition, within a mosque in Jabaliya. Notably, some of these items were found concealed in bags belonging to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

On December 9, 2023, members of the al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas) discharged firearms at Israel Defense Forces (IDF) personnel from within a UNRWA school located in Beit Hanoun.

On November 8, 2023, Israeli Defense Forces discovered a tunnel shaft in proximity to a UNRWA school located in Gaza.

Dr. Michael Milshtein, who leads the Palestinian Studies Forum at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, remarked on March 19, 2024, that Hamas engages with certain clans or presents itself covertly as law enforcement personnel in civilian attire or as members of the civil defense organization. He pointed out that Hamas has emphasized recent instances of relatively organized food distribution, conducted under the auspices of the civil defense in Gaza, specifically at the UNRWA headquarters, as proof that stability is being restored.

The Wall Street Journal disclosed on January 29, 2024, information from Israeli intelligence that outlined the participation of UNRWA employees in the October 7 attack, as well as their connections to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The report indicates that 12 employees of UNRWA were implicated in the October 7 attack, with seven of them serving as teachers in UNRWA schools. Furthermore, approximately 10 percent of the total UNRWA workforce in the Gaza Strip, which amounts to around 1,200 individuals, is linked to Islamic terrorist organizations. Almost half of these employees have immediate family members who are operatives for Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

WSJ emphasized that the intelligence assessment provided to the United States is based on classified data, which includes the surveillance of mobile phone communications, investigations of Hamas operatives apprehended by Israel, and documents that were confiscated.

On October 7, 2023, an employee of UNRWA abducted the remains of soldier Yonatan Samarno and placed him into a UNRWA vehicle while returning to the Gaza Strip.

Notable instances of terrorist operatives held high-ranking roles and served as instructors within UNRWA institutions

Sohail al-Hindi is a member of the political bureau of the Hamas movement, which plays a crucial role in formulating the terrorist

attack strategies of the al-Qassam Brigades. He has held the position of chairman of the UNRWA workers’ union in the Gaza Strip for many years and has also served as the head of the UNRWA teachers’ sector. Al-Hindi has been open about his affiliations with Hamas and has actively engaged in political activities as its representative. His influence extended to UNRWA’s educational framework, particularly through his role as a supervisor at the summer camp for UNRWA students.

In July 2001, al-Hindi participated in a ceremony at a school located in the Jabaliya refugee camp alongside Hamas leader Ahmed Yassin. During his address to distinguished students, he lauded the suicide bombers who emerged from the Palestinian education system, asserting that “the path to Palestine is paved with the blood of martyrs. The student martyrs create history with their (exploding) body parts.”

Since at least 2004, the senior leadership of UNRWA was aware that Sohail al-Hindi, who led the teachers’ sector, was a prominent Hamas operative advocating for jihad against Israel, including suicide attacks. Chris Gunness, the chief spokesman for UNRWA, acknowledged the allegations against al-Hindi in an article published on the Ynet website on January 27, 2009, which referenced prior reports detailing Hamas’s activities within UNRWA schools and confirmed al-Hindi’s employment with the organization. Gunness characterized these allegations as recycled claims that had been presented to UNRWA in previous years. Despite this, Sohail al-Hindi remained employed by UNRWA, which opted to overlook the media scrutiny regarding his status as a senior Hamas operative. The pressure on UNRWA intensified following al-Hindi’s election to the political bureau of Hamas, ultimately leading the organization to announce his dismissal in March 2017.

Amir al-Mis-hal, who succeeded al-Hindi, is recognized as a critic of the peace process. On May 16, 2008, Mishael, then serving as the head of the services sector at UNRWA, made a statement during a Nakba Day event, asserting, “What was taken by force will not be returned except by force and not by peace and decisions [of politicians]. We have the right and duty to protect it [Palestine]. Our strength lies in our unity.” Four years later, on May 15, 2012, al-Mis-hal was instrumental in an event that honored Palestinian prisoners and commemorated Nakba Day.”

Jawad Abu Shamala was a member of the political bureau of the Hamas movement,

where he played a significant role in formulating the terrorist strategies of the al-Qassam Brigades. He also held the position of head of Hamas' economic department. Prior to his involvement with Hamas, Abu Shamala worked as a teacher at a UNRWA school in the Gaza Strip. He lost his life during an IDF strike on October 10, 2023.

Issa Abd al-Hadi al-Batran was born in 1973 in the al-Boreij refugee camp located in Gaza. His educational journey included attending primary and middle school under UNRWA, followed by Khaled bin al-Walid High School, the Gaza Training Center (UNRWA), and Al-Quds Open University. For years, Batran served as a teacher at UNRWA schools in the central district of the Gaza Strip, even though the heads of UNRWA were aware of him being a senior operative in the Al-Qassam Brigades and that he was several times the target of the IDF's assassination attempts. He was ultimately dismissed from UNRWA in 2009 following a severe injury sustained during a work-related incident while involved with the Al-Qassam Brigades, and he was subsequently killed in an IDF strike in July 2010.

Awad al-Qiq held the positions of teacher, educator, and administrator within UNRWA schools in Rafah, concurrently serving as the leader of the weapon production unit for Islamic Jihad. He was killed on April 30, 2008, during an airstrike targeting a weapons production facility in Rafah.

Al-Qiq served as a senior operative responsible for the development and production of rockets for Islamic Jihad, as well as the preparation of explosive devices and warfare strategies. He played a crucial role in training successive generations of "engineers" utilizing the expertise he had acquired. In the summer of 2006, al-Qiq traveled to China, where he expressed interest in light aircraft, potentially with the intention of acquiring and manufacturing them for conducting attacks against Israel.

Al-Qiq's involvement in terrorism came to light in September 2007, following an assassination attempt on his life by Israel. Despite this incident, he persisted in his roles as a teacher, educator, and administrator within UNRWA's schools, actively participating in the education of children and adolescents during summer camps. The reasons behind UNRWA's decision to retain him in his teaching and educational roles after his activities were revealed remain unclear.

Said Siyam was a close associate of Hamas leader Khaled Mashal and subsequently held

LEADING UNRWA DONORS		
Donor	Total Contribution Pledges in USD for 2023	Rank
USA	422,004,945	1
Germany	212,890,232	2
EU (including ECHO)	120,165,744	3
France	62,421,104	4
Sweden	48,893,860	5
Japan	48,530,158	6
Norway	45,718,620	7
Netherlands	40,754,272	8
Canada	39,385,264	9
UK	36,872,747	10
Spain (Including Regional Governments)	30,715,278	11
Switzerland	26,797,659	12
Denmark	25,533,021	13
UNRWA USA National Committee	22,258,300	14
Türkiye	22,103,820	15
Ireland	19,241,556	16
Saudi Arabia (including King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre)	17,000,000	17
UAE	15,003,330	18
Australia	15,000,000	19
Luxemburg	14,542,856	20

the position of Minister of the Interior within the Hamas government, overseeing the military operations in the Gaza Strip. He dedicated 23 years to serving as an additional teacher and educator in UNRWA schools. Until 2003, Siyam represented Hamas on the coordination committee of national and Islamic forces, which managed activities during the al-Aqsa intifada. Despite his prominent role as a senior activist in Hamas, UNRWA did not take action to expel him from its organization. Siyam lost his life in an IDF strike in January 2009.

Zuhair Al-Kaisi held the position of senior commander within the Islamic terrorist organization known as "The Popular Resistance Committees." Concurrently, he worked for

several years as a mathematics teacher in UNRWA schools while also being affiliated with a terrorist group (Rafik al-Salami factions). He lost his life during an IDF operation in March 2012.

Numerous operatives from the al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas) and the al-Quds Brigades (Islamic Jihad) have completed their education at UNRWA schools and colleges located in the Gaza Strip.

Policy advisories

The time has come to ask UNRWA donor nations who contribute \$1.6 billion to UNRWA to implement new policies:

- Cancellation of the new UNRWA curriculum, based on Jihad, martyrdom and "right of return by force of arms", which have no place in UN education, whose theme is "Peace Begins Here".

- Disarmament of UNRWA schools and cessation of paramilitary training connected to all UNRWA schools. It is an absurdity that UNRWA, a UN agency with a purported commitment to "peace education", allows such arms training and missile fire in proximity of its premises.

- Insisting that UNRWA dismiss employees affiliated with Hamas, Islamic Jihad or Fatah in accordance with laws of donor nations that forbid aid to any agency that employs members of a terrorist organization.

- Introducing UNHCR standards to advance resettlement of fourth- and fifth-generation refugees from the 1948 war who have spent seven decades relegated to refugee status. Current UNRWA policy is that any Arab refugee resettlement would interfere with the "right of return" to pre-1948 Arab localities. By adopting the stance of Arab maximalists, UNRWA flouts its commitment to assist the Arab refugees from 1948 and their descendants.

- Demanding an audit of donor funds that emanate from 68 nations. This would address documented reports of wasted resources, duplication of services and an undesired flow of cash to the terror groups that dominate UNRWA operations. ■

David Bedein has covered UNRWA since 1987, engaging Arab and Jewish journalists, producing 25 movies shot on location, reviewing all textbooks used by students who study in UNRWA schools located in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem. The research is accessible at his site, IsraelBehindTheNews.com. He is the author of UNRWA: Roadblock to Peace.