



## Policy Brief

05 March 2018

### UNRWA and US funding cuts

President Trump's decision in January 2018 to withhold \$65 million from the United States' annual contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is further evidence – after his decision on the status of Jerusalem last year – of a more partisan and hostile policy approach towards Palestine. The Delegation shares the concerns of UNRWA, especially as they relate to the welfare of those Palestinians who will be affected by this cut, and the consequences that it may give rise to.

#### UNRWA's mandate

UNRWA was established in 1949 for the express purpose of administering aid in the form of education, health care, camp maintenance, relief and social services to Palestinian refugees following the 1948 conflict (which led to their displacement) until today. In the absence of a resolution to the refugee issue, UNRWA's mandate has been continually extended to meet the ever-present and urgent needs of up to five million Palestinian refugees from Gaza to Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.<sup>1</sup> Of particular significance is UNRWA's investment in and maintenance of schools; education alone forms 54% of its annual budget. In the organization's own words, "it is a priority that school-aged children complete quality, equitable and inclusive basic education".<sup>2</sup>

#### Potential consequences

In a 2003 report on donor contributions to UNRWA, Professor Rex Brynen of McGill University warned that because the Agency is providing essential services to a dispossessed and politically sensitive population, any substantial reduction of core services could easily lead to rising discontent, with adverse consequences for the host countries as well as regional stability.<sup>3</sup> The US decision will also likely prove inimical to its own interests in the region, and further enhance the appeal of anti-American and Islamist voices. Perhaps most concerning, however, are the almost certain impacts on hundreds of thousands of young Palestinian refugees who are now at risk educationally and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unrwa.org/how-you-can-help/how-we-spend-funds>

<sup>3</sup> Brynen, R., 2003. Donor contributions to UNRWA. *Social service delivery to Palestinian refugees: UNRWA and other providers, UNRWA financial and donor environment*, 3, p172.





developmentally. It is clear that the first victims of this shortfall (roughly one-half of the previous year's budget) will be those attending UNRWA-funded schools. The upshot is even more limited opportunities for an already demoralized Palestinian youth. Pierre Krähenbühl, the Agency's Commissioner-General, asserts that there will be a heightened and very real risk of radicalization of young Palestinians who, with no formal educational avenues available to them, will seek purpose and fulfillment elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

### **Further evidence of America's incapacity to be an impartial mediator**

President Trump's second unilateral decision in less than a month has further bolstered the PA's conviction that the US can no longer play the role of a fair-minded peace broker. Similarly, it has affirmed the need for President Abbas's new strategy of establishing a multilateral council to oversee future negotiations and to uphold international law by holding both sides accountable to their obligations as outlined in the relevant UN resolutions.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/feb/21/trump-cuts-un-agency-for-palestinianrefugees-millions-in-jeopardy-generation-radicalised>

