



October 30, 2024

Your Beatitudes,

The Higher Presidential Committee for Church Affairs in Palestine extends its warmest regards and profound respect to you. We write today with an urgent matter, alerting you to the severe implications of two recent laws enacted by the Israeli Knesset against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). These unprecedented and controversial laws aim to prohibit all UNRWA activities and ban any form of interaction with the agency. This legislation marks the first instance of a UN member state passing legislation to obstruct the operations of a UN agency.

The first of these laws states that UNRWA shall not operate any representative office, provide any service, or engage in any activity, directly or indirectly, while the second explicitly prohibits any communication with UNRWA.

Your Beatitudes,

These laws represent a grave and profound affront to humanity. By effectively denying Palestinian refugees access to essential services, they undermine the very foundations of dignity and human rights. Such legislations not only endanger vulnerable populations—children, women,



and the elderly—but also stands as a direct assault on the moral conscience of the international community, particularly the religious institutions devoted to upholding justice and human rights.

Should these measures come into effect, they will trigger a humanitarian catastrophe, halting the lifeline of support for millions of Palestinian refugees across Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem. Depriving refugees of vital services poses risks that extend well beyond Palestine, threatening regional stability and undermining efforts for peace, in which UNRWA plays a critical role.

The implications of these laws are clear and far-reaching. They aim to terminate UNRWA's mandate as stipulated in United Nations Resolution 302 of 1949, contravening the UN Charter and its principles. Under such legislation, UNRWA would lose its diplomatic status, visa issuance for its staff would be blocked, coordination of imported goods would be halted, and tax exemptions would be rescinded. These actions not only violate international norms but also constitute a direct assault on the UN and its agencies.

Once enforced, these laws will not only hinder UNRWA's operations in occupied Jerusalem but also result in the closure of its 17 facilities, which currently serve over 200,000 Palestinian refugees in the city. The impact will further extend to 96 UNRWA schools in the West Bank and Jerusalem, serving nearly 49,000 students, and 284 in Gaza, serving around 298,000 students, along with 43 health centers in the West Bank and Jerusalem and 22 in Gaza, depriving countless Palestinians of essential education and healthcare access.



Let us not forget the heavy toll already exacted upon UNRWA staff and facilities. Israel's assault on Gaza has resulted in the killing of over 233 UNRWA staff members, in addition to the detention of hundreds more. More than 200 UNRWA facilities have been destroyed, including direct attacks on UNRWA schools turned shelters, causing thousands of casualties. Such attacks on humanitarian organizations and their personnel cannot and must not be allowed to set a precedent tolerated by the international community, as they undermine the UN and other humanitarian organizations' ability to carry out their vital missions.

Your Beatitudes,

The Higher Presidential Committee for Church Affairs in Palestine urges you to take a resolute stance against these laws. Such legislations not only deepen an already dire humanitarian crisis but seek to dismantle the indispensable role of UNRWA, stripping it of its mandate and eroding its protections.

We call upon you to engage with your governments to take practical, immediate actions that align with their longstanding political and financial commitments to UNRWA and to compel Israel to retract these laws. Preserving UNRWA's humanitarian mission, which has sustained vulnerable populations for over 75 years, and cannot be fulfilled by any other institution, is a matter of profound moral urgency.

Moreover, we urge you to amplify your voices within the international community. Through your diplomatic channels, please convey solidarity



with UNRWA to international bodies, particularly the United Nations and the European Union, in a collective effort to oppose these laws that contravene all ethical and humanitarian standards.

We place our trust in your commitment to advocate with your governments to secure the continuity of UNRWA's services and the protection of its mission, as it is an essential pillar of regional stability through the educational, healthcare, and relief services it provides to more than 5.9 million Palestinian refugees.

In closing, we reaffirm the inalienable right of return for Palestinian refugees, as enshrined in United Nations Resolution 194 of 1948—a right that cannot be diminished by time or occupation. UNRWA shall continue its critical work across its five areas of operation, including the occupied Palestinian territories until a comprehensive solution to the refugee issue is achieved in line with international law.

With our deepest respect and appreciation.

Dr. Ramzi Khouri

Member of the PLO Executive Committee

**Head of the Higher Presidential Committee for Church Affairs in
Palestine**

