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# The collapsed credibility of the UN agencies disqualifies them from participating in the reconstruction of Gaza under the same mandate

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The credibility of international humanitarian organisations in the Palestinian territories has further declined following discoveries during Israeli actions in Gaza, calling into question their ability to participate in post-conflict reconstruction operations.

The discovery of the Hamas underground bunker system under protected facilities (hospitals and schools), weapons in civilian facilities, and the footage of Israeli hostages in a hospital caused criticism of agencies from the UN system.

Along with Israel's destruction of Hamas's infrastructure in Gaza, there is an increasing disapproval, primarily towards the **UN Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)**, a crucial international organisation for social, health and educational support for Palestinian refugees, from 1949.

This agency is a year older than **UNHCR**, the UN agency that helps refugees globally except for the Palestinians. UNRWA's principal internal contradiction stems from that exclusivity and a long-standing mandate, which has affected its credibility long before Israel's current war with Hamas.

## Help in building Hamas's infrastructure

Cuts to funding accompanied years of debate over the purpose of UNRWA, primarily from the US, and calls for the UNHCR to assume responsibility for the organisation's duties as the UN's global agency for refugee assistance.

However, the Palestinians and some Arab allies recognised the danger of revoking the Palestinians' right to return to their homes and their permanent retention of refugee status.

Representatives of the UN, particularly the UNRWA, with great effort and questionable effect, have been rejecting increasingly frequent and severe accusations that they contributed to the strengthening of Hamas's military potential aimed at Israel, with or

without intention.

The mission has lost 100 of its associates since the start of the Israeli operation in Gaza. However, its critics often place these casualties in the context of the excessive number of people in the UN mission (about 30,000) and the involvement of the local population in its operations.

This context has been used as evidence that the UN mission has been too long-running and too affected by one side of the conflict (Palestinians and Hamas), which is why, over time, it has increasingly violated the UN's principle of political neutrality in its international missions.

**Despite pointing out the systematic usurpation of protected facilities by Palestinian extremists, nothing changed in UNRWA's mandate, nor in its massive organisation**

UNRWA has consistently documented the illegal military presence of Palestinian extremists at establishments protected by the UN. The first instance of this type was reported in 2014 when it discovered 20 rockets put by Hamas in an abandoned school in Gaza under UNRWA's control.

"This is a flagrant violation of the inviolability of our premises under international law", the UN agency announced at the time, and warned that it "endangered civilians including staff and put UNRWA's vital mission at risk".

Similar reports by the UN agency followed, until the last ones, just before the Hamas attacks on Israel. The head of UNRWA operations in Lebanon **announced last August** that the extremists continued to occupy the school compound in the refugee camps in the south of the country, and by then, there were already 8 reports.

Despite pointing out the systematic usurpation of protected facilities by Palestinian extremists, nothing changed in

UNRWA's mandate, nor in its massive organisation, until the escalation of the conflict last October.

## Change of mandate and termination of funding

The discovery of Hamas' underground tunnel networks, with access from hospitals and schools, has given the opponents of UN missions arguments for heavy blows to the credibility and impartiality of international agencies.

The representative of Israel at the UN recently stated that many UNRWA associates are also members of Hamas and that this calls into question all their previous reports and statistics on the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres himself has been part of the UN's credibility crisis since the start of the Gaza crisis due to his initial relativisation of the terrorist attacks by Hamas.

However, after the documented abuse of civilian facilities in Gaza by Hamas, he recently stated that "Hamas and other militants use civilians as human shields, and continue to launch rockets indiscriminately towards Israel".



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But he denied that the UN knew about the weapons in protected facilities and even directed a sting towards Israel – “If the Israelis, with all their intelligence capabilities, did not know an attack was going to happen, how can we know that weapons are hidden under or near the UN in Gaza?”

The UN Secretary-General has reasons to worry about the credibility of his organisation, particularly his missions that have operations in crisis areas. The World Health Organisation, which operates within the UN system, is having a hard time coping with accusations that it was disinterested and even corrupt when Hamas placed its arsenals in health facilities in Gaza, severely violating international humanitarian law.

In addition to Israel, which has been demanding the abolition of UNRWA for a long time, a **request by 12 Republican senators** has recently been submitted to the US Senate. They requested that President Joe Biden's proposal to award \$9 billion in humanitarian aid to Gaza be rejected.

According to the letter from the Republican senators “sending aid to the Palestinians in Gaza is akin to funnelling aid directly to Hamas”.

Following the most recent disclosures on Hamas' misuse of civilian infrastructure in Gaza, it will be difficult for UN agencies to keep functioning as support for the future reconstruction of Gaza and support for the civilian population. At least not in the mandate they had decades ago.