

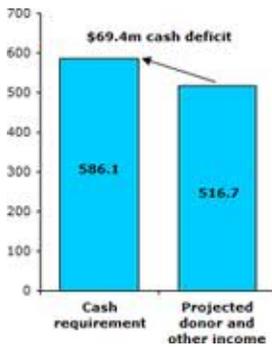
UNRWA AND THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

The origins of UNRWA



- The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was founded by Resolution 302 (iv) of 8 December 1949, titled “Assistance to Palestine Refugees”.
- This resolution tasks UNRWA with managing the program of assistance to Palestine refugees as envisaged by Resolution 212 (iii) of 19 November 1949, allocating 5 million dollars (about 150 million dollars today).
- This program was designed to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees belonging to all communities (par. 1 of the preamble and art. 12 of Resolution 212), including both Arabs and Jews who lost their homes in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.
- The wording of the resolution uses the language preceding the constitution of the State of Israel, whereby “Palestine” means the area where the Jewish and the Arab State should have been constituted. Subsequently, the resolutions have been interpreted according to the Arab narrative, whereby “Palestine” means the State of the Palestinians.
- Originally, the assistance program was meant to terminate in August 1949, when the international community wanted to create an agency mandated to solve the refugee question, aggravated by political instability in the Middle East.
- According to the resolution, UNRWA is mandated to cooperate with other UN agencies and Arab states hosting Palestine refugees in order to implement programs and projects for the almost 600,000 refugees. International assistance was meant to terminate on 31 December 1950.
- UNRWA Steering Committee was initially composed of: Turkey, France, UK, and USA.
- After 1950, UNRWA mandate has been periodically renewed, making UNRWA a *de facto* permanent agency, with essentially different objectives and structure.

UNRWA Today



- UNRWA manages today a budget of 1.3 billion dollars, with an annual deficit of about 64 million dollar. UNRWA funds consist of donations by the Steering Committee member states and voluntary donations by other UN member states and individuals—a characteristic that distinguishes UNRWA from other international organizations.
- UNRWA has 29,000 Palestinian permanent workers and other international personnel.



- From the initial 600,000 refugees, UNRWA manages now services for more than 5,270,000 refugees, including original refugees and their descendants, in five areas, including Gaza, West Bank, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Of these, 4,700,000 are considered refugees while the others are called “other registered persons”.
- From a humanitarian assistance organization, UNRWA has become an agency providing educational, health, financial, infrastructural, and emergency services.
- UNRWA manages 700 schools, offering free education to almost 500,000 children and employing 20,000 teachers. Educational services also include training courses (business, fashion, nursing, and architecture) and scholarships.
- UNRWA manages 138 hospitals, 117 dental centers, employing 3,600 doctors and providing assistance to 10 million patients every year.
- UNRWA funds different microcredit programs for domestic, young entrepreneurship, startups, and for the assistance to jobless.
- UNRWA builds streets, buildings, hospitals, schools, and other infrastructure where the so-called Palestinian refugees reside, the refugee camps.
- UNRWA intervenes with other projects in cases of emergency, in Gaza, West Bank, and Lebanon especially. Often, conflict outbursts among Arab factions, such as in Nahr el-Bared

(North Lebanon), where in 2007 Lebanese armed forces fought against the fundamentalist group Fatah al-Islam.

- UNRWA funding resolution established a Steering Committee of seven members. Today, it includes 25 members: the initially four, France, Turkey, UK, and US to which other 21 joined: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Syria. Palestine, European Union, and the Arab League participate as observers.

Distinctiveness of UNRWA

- UNRWA is the only UN agency working for a specific national community, the Palestinians, while other UN agencies work on a specific area (FAO in food, UNDP in development, UN Women in gender rights etc.) or on a specific mission in a conflict zone (UN Mission in Somalia, UN Mission in Lebanon, etc.).
- UNRWA works for those Palestinians that are considered refugees. The UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) provides assistance to refugees in the world, according to a recognized definition of “refugee” which is different from the UNRWA definition of “Palestinian refugee”. Moreover, UNRWA is the only UN agency that recognizes permanent and intergenerational refugee status.
- UNRWA is the only UN agency that employs permanent personnel among the beneficiaries to whom it provides assistance.
- UNRWA is the only UN agency that permanently provides a national group for services usually provided by states, including schools, hospitals, and public infrastructure.
- UNRWA is the only agency that raises funds among individuals, as usually associations and foundations do.

Criticism to UNRWA

- Conceived as a temporary organization for Palestine refugees, UNRWA has become an agency that provides services to those who are considered Palestinian refugees of the 1948 war and their descendants. For the past 60 years, many academics, politicians, and journalists have criticized UNRWA for its negative impact on the Arab-Israel conflict.
- Firstly, the definitions of “Palestinian refugee” and “refugee camp” are based on Arab narrative and not on international refugee law, which is functional to Arab historical claims, including the right of return.
- Secondly, to recognize the refugee status to the descendants of the 1948 refugees creates dependence and perpetuates Palestinian economic and political instability.
- Finally, UNRWA, by providing services, replaces the states in which its beneficiaries reside and consequently weakens the role of the Palestinian National Authority and strengthens its opponents, including Hamas.

The Definition of Refugee



Entrance to the refugee camp "Aida", Bethlehem

- According to international law, refugees are individuals who have fled from their country because of a conflict and are impeded from going back because they fear for their life or because they may be victim of persecution.
- UNRWA has adopted a working definition of "Palestinian refugee", which includes individuals whose regular place of residence was located in the territory of the Mandatory Palestine (now Israel and the PNA-ruled territories) between 1946 and 1948, and moved as a consequence of the war waged by Arab states against Israel.



Refugee Camp "Nahr el-Bared", North Lebanon

- The places where Palestinian refugees settled are still defined "refugee camps", although they are urban neighborhoods with buildings, electricity, water, and wastage.
- According to international law, states should provide shelter, naturalize, or resettle refugees, for their rapid absorption.
- "Palestinian refugees" are a paralegal category, functional to UNRWA activities. Moreover, UNRWA recognizes refugee status to the descendants of 1948 refugees, originally 600,000 and now numbered 4,700,000.
- Beneficiaries of UNRWA services include recognized Palestinian refugees and other individuals called "registered persons".

- The perpetuation of refugee status by UNRWA legitimizes the “right of return” claimed by “Palestinian refugees” over properties and places left behind during the 1948 war.



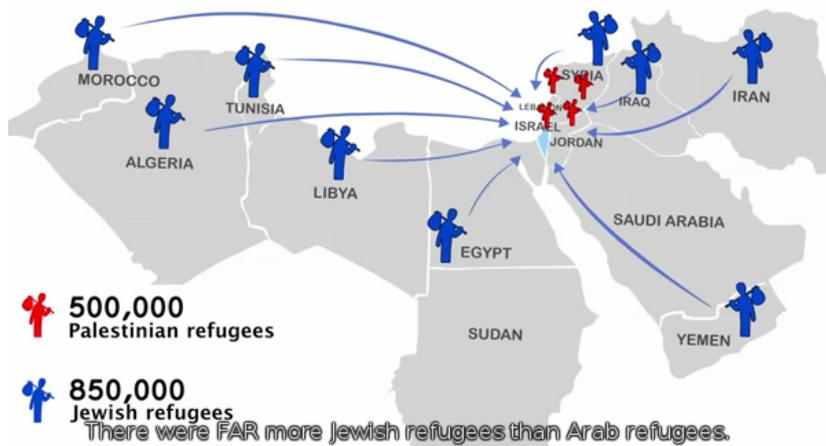
- This specificity is considered a political action that legitimizes the aspirations of a national group considering Israel the primary cause of its political and social instability and results in the radicalization of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Economic and Social Dependence: Is UNRWA Beneficial to the Palestinians?



- Originally, UNRWA was meant to support hosting states to implement projects and programs in favor of “Palestinian refugees”, but has become a permanent agency working directly for “refugees” and their descendants.
- UNRWA directly provides services to its beneficiaries and permanently employs Palestinian personnel, substituting states in public services management, including schools and hospitals.
- The direct provision of services and the permanent employment of personnel makes UNRWA an indispensable agency for the community it works for, whereas its mission should consist of creating opportunities for “Palestinian refugees” to permanently settle.
- Recently, hostility between Palestinians and UNRWA is increasing due to economic dependence. After budget cuts in 2013, UNRWA diminished the distribution of cash money to the “refugees”, resulting in demonstrations and assaults to UNRWA offices in Gaza, which provide services for 800,000 refugees (two thirds of Gaza population).
- UNRWA activities in countries where “Palestinian refugees” have not yet been naturalized, like in Jordan, and where they are discriminated against, like in Lebanon, are necessary for supporting Palestinian population. UNRWA has never denounced these violations of Palestinian human rights.

- UNRWA replaces the PNA in West Bank and Gaza, where UNRWA has become a competitor of the Palestinian Authority.
- If the goal is to absorb “Palestinian refugees”, after the foundation of the Palestinian Authority, UNRWA could have worked for strengthening Palestinian political and administrative institutions and for the progressive repatriation of the “refugees” in the PNA-ruled territories.
- UNRWA claims that the perpetuation of the refugee status is due to the extraordinary circumstances that caused the Palestine refugees to flee from their properties. However, the historical origin of the refugees does not imply any distinction between Palestinian and other refugees in the world, while considering “Palestinian refugees” as a special case in history stems from a specific political view regarding the creation of the State of Israel.



- The legitimization of the “right of return” is considered as an anti-Israeli policy, which fosters the absorption of five million refugees in Israel. In 1950s, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Moshe Sharett proposed a pecuniary compensation, which also considered Jewish refugees from Arab States consequently to the creation of the State of Israel.

Political implications of UNRWA activities

- After the Six Day War in 1967 and the beginning of Israeli administration over Gaza and the West Bank, Israel guaranteed continuity to UNRWA activities in spite of increasingly hostile relations with the institution.
- UNRWA accuses Israel of impeding efficient assistance to refugees through security measures like checkpoints, curfews, and traffic control.
- Regarding armed conflicts, UNRWA has often claimed Israel violates international armed conflict law by targeting UNRWA infrastructure and personnel.
- Israel accuses UNRWA of adopting an openly anti-Israeli policy: UNRWA does not comment on internal Palestinian issues, such as the civil war in Gaza and the numerous violations of human rights. Additionally, Israel claims UNRWA does not take a clear stand against terrorism.
- Anti-UNRWA movements also allege a consistent education to hatred in UNRWA schools, which adopt the curricula of the hosting state where the “refugee camps” are located. Specifically, Palestinian textbooks use unequivocally anti-Israeli language and images. According to these allegations, UNRWA does not stop the spread of anti-Israeli narrative and the glorification of suicidal martyrs.

- UNRWA, in response, claims that educational programs conform to the national authorities governing the territories where it operates.



Peter Hansen, UNRWA General Commissioner from 1996 to 2005

- Former UNRWA General Commissioner Peter Hansen, in an interview given to the Canadian television CBC, declared that UNRWA might employ Hamas-affiliated personnel, because UNRWA may not discriminate on grounds of political affiliation. Indeed, Hamas is also considered a political movement, whereby Hamas members cannot be automatically considered as militants.
- During the 2009 War in Gaza, Israel hit a target near the UNRWA-managed Jabalya School. Israel accused Hamas of using UNRWA buildings for terrorist activities. UNRWA accused Israel of deliberately targeting the school and of causing 350 deaths. Subsequently, UNRWA stepped off, declaring Israel hit a target near the school without causing deaths.



A UN ambulance used by terrorists in Gaza, 2004

- The most serious diplomatic incident was the 2004 scandal regarding an UNRWA ambulance used for transporting terrorists. UNRWA confirmed the incident and exhorted the parties to respect the neutrality of the organization.
- UNRWA activities in the West Bank and Gaza often cause Palestinian discontent for Palestinians aspire to more independence.
- Hamas-UNRWA relations are hostile and, at least in two occasions, resulted in violence: in 2009 Hamas militants assaulted UNRWA food stocks; consequently, UNRWA threatened to stop the aid distribution.



Palestinian protest in UNRWA

headquarters in Ramallah, January 2013

- UNRWA policies regarding gender equality caused violent reactions by Hamas and other Islamist groups active in Gaza: in 2010, a summer camp site under construction was burnt and the UNRWA director in Gaza was threatened to death. Hamas condemned the episode, but suggested UNRWA should adapt its activities to Palestinian cultural standards, implying gender separation in schools and other activities. UNRWA surrendered to the pressures and separated activities for male and female children.
- Hamas also opposed the teaching of the Holocaust, which was excluded from UNRWA curricula in 2011.
- Recently, UNRWA cancelled the “Gaza Marathon 2013”, a global solidarity event for Palestinians in Gaza, because Hamas would impede from women to participate.
- Israel accused UNRWA of not condemning clearly terrorism and Hamas in specific. UNRWA claims neutrality, as required by humanitarian assistance given to Palestinians irrespectively of political affiliations. UNRWA emphasizes that Hamas is also a political movement, and therefore one cannot distinguish between militants and political affiliates.

Reactions of Canada and United States

- Because of policy analyses that emphasize the negative impact of UNRWA on Palestinian independence, Canada and USA have reduced funding to UNRWA.
- In 2010, Canada radically changed policy with regard to Palestinian refugees. Canada used to fund 11% of UNRWA budget and decided to transfer the same budget to the funding of democratization projects in the PNA. This decision was condemned by USA, EU, and even Israel and, according to some analysts, it was one of the reasons why Canada lost its seat in the Security Council of the UN.



US Senator Mark Kirk

- Senator Kirk of the US Congress passed in 2013 an amendment to the law regulating financial aid. This amendment obliges the Secretary of State to submit an annual report on UNRWA beneficiaries, which has to distinguish between original 1948 refugees and their descendants. This annual report also has to emphasize the national interest of the US to support UNRWA, in terms of national security.

Documentaries on UNRWA

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5Jo12mnVkM>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGJajyjMCbs>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFSeHLVqn2A>

Interview with Prof. Nitza Nachmias



UNRWA is the only UN aid agency specifically designed for one people, the Palestinians; UNRWA's mandate applies only to support of the Palestinian refugees, who are legally defined according to a definition specifically intended for them. How does this situation distinguish itself from others, in that it requires a specific agency and a specific definition?

UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, was created in 1949 for taking care of the refugees of the 1948 War between Israel and Arab States (also known in Israel as War of Independence). The UNHCR convention, which established the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, was signed later in 1951. Although UNRWA already existed, it was not incorporated into UNHCR, because the General Assembly assumed that by 1951 there would not be UNRWA: indeed, everybody assumed that by 1951 the Palestinian refugees problem would be settled.

Many efforts were done to solve the problem of the Palestinian refugees.

UNRWA's initial mandate was for 3 years. The Secretary General at the time, Trygve Lie, and later Dag Hammarskjold, worked hard to resettle the refugees in Sinai, and in the host Arab countries. However, the Arab States vetoed all their efforts. Still in 1949, the United Nations convened Israel and Arab States at the Lausanne Conference, in order to settle disputes arising from the 1948 War; on this occasion, Ben-Gurion proposed the so-called "Gaza Plan", which offered the annexation of the Egyptian-controlled territory of Gaza to Israel, with the absorption of 280,000 refugees and residents. Egypt rejected this proposal.

So, the whole issue with the Palestinian having an aid agency just for them boils down to two facts. First, the UN has never defined who is a "Palestinian refugee", with severe legal implications and with the consequent perpetuation of the refugee status through generations.

Secondly, UNRWA was created for a temporary operational task, which was to settle the refugees originating from the 1948 War; nevertheless, today, UNRWA's existence is accepted as a *fait accompli*.

Why are they not refugees? And how come everybody considers them as such?

First, international law determines that if you become a citizen of a host country or of a third country you lose your refugee status. You cannot be both a refugee and a citizen of a state. Second, international law defines refugees as people who fled their homeland because of persecution and who cannot go back because they fear for their lives. If you yourself did not suffer persecution, and can go back to your homeland without fear for your life, you are not a refugee according to international law.

For example: Palestinians living in Jordan: they can go to the West Bank without fearing for their lives, and they never experienced or fled persecution. In this respect, the Palestinians who live in Europe and are naturalized European citizens represent the most obvious case. Furthermore, there is no legal category for second or third or fourth generation refugees in international law; Palestinians are practically permanent refugees! Even Palestinians in the West Bank and in Gaza are not to be considered refugees because they are *de facto* citizens of the Palestinian Authority, which issues passports, collects taxes, governs territories, and has jurisdiction over residents. This was the whole idea behind the 1993 agreements; Declaration of Principles, signed between Israel and the PLO, when UNRWA was asked to plan the phasing out of its operations and dismantle.

But there are Palestinian refugees who still do not have any citizenship. Are they not refugees then?

No, not even those Palestinians who have not yet adopted any citizenship can be considered refugees. There are for example people in Jordan who are not Jordanian citizens but are permanent residents, with property rights, working permits, etc.

Generally, there are three categories: people living in territories administered by the Palestinian Authority; people living all over the world having acquired citizenship of host countries; and people living outside the West Bank or Gaza without citizenship.

With regard to the first category, the Palestinian Authority functions as a State: it pays salaries to officials in both the West Bank and Gaza, where it cooperates with Hamas as if in a federal system with Gazans being represented in the PA parliament. Therefore, Palestinians under PA control with Palestinian citizenship cannot be considered refugees. The same goes with regard to the second category, because they have become citizens of one State.

With regard to the third category, there are Palestinians living outside the West Bank and Gaza, including Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, and Lebanon, who are not citizens of their host countries, but they have working permits, they can marry, they can purchase property; ultimately, they don't vote because they do not enjoy political rights connected to citizenship, but they do enjoy all social and civil rights – except in Lebanon, which is a special case. All the others cannot be considered refugees because they are integrated into the hosting societies.

You have just said that Lebanon is a special case, why?

Lebanon does not allow Palestinians to integrate into Lebanese society; it keeps them in special areas, without working permits, without social and economic rights. Therefore, UNRWA has to support them.

The Lebanese government is acting in blatant violation of international law. The refugee convention binds States to protect refugees it hosts and recognizes as well the right to deport them; however, once a State accepts refugees, it is bound to recognize their civil and social rights. Lebanon has not deported Palestinians and, yet, does not recognize civil and social rights. By so doing, Lebanon consistently violates international law.

One has to consider that Lebanon has a tremendous problem of ethnic balance between Christians and Muslims, which affects power-sharing agreements and ultimately determines who holds power. Lebanon has never accepted Palestinians into its society and has never naturalized them because it does not want Muslims to outnumber Christians in such a precarious balance. This, however, has nothing to do with Israel and the consistent violation of international law shows that the international community failed miserably to protect Palestinians.

UNRWA does not denounce this evident violation of international law and does not act against Lebanon because it is a service agency and it does not object to having as many clients as possible. UNRWA collects hundreds of millions of dollars for the Palestinians in Lebanon. Lebanon is a big project, and UNRWA functions as a corporation organization looking to implement projects: the more money they have the more people they can employ. Why would they want to act against Lebanon? It would be against their own interest as an organization.

UNRWA takes also care of the descendants. Why?

Regarding descendants of 1948 war refugees; nowhere, does the UNRWA original mandate legally, politically, and historically tasks this agency with taking care of descendants. Take the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; it takes care of refugees in the world and its main goal is to resettle them where repatriation is not possible. Never in history has the refugee status been recognized to the third –fourth and fifth generations. The Palestinians are the only ones. Were this the general rule, then, I could also claim the refugee status because my parents fled from Poland to (pre-state) Israel and I am a second generation refugee.

UNRWA first started taking care of the descendants even if it was not specified in its original mandate. Consequently, in 1965, the Arab States proposed the General Assembly of the UN to pass a resolution for UNRWA to take care of descendants, but it was rejected. In 1982, another proposal was advanced, and the General Assembly accepted the request to take care of descendants; and therefore, here we are with three and four generations of refugees, a unique case in history.

UNRWA is a very controversial UN agency; besides its mandate, even its governance and administration have been criticized. Could you point out some of the most controversial aspects of its internal organization?

There are several such controversial aspects.

Let's start with something unusual. UNRWA has a pension fund of over 1 billion dollars invested in Swiss banks and often the fund even loses money. I got to know about it while I was interviewing an Italian legal attaché of UNRWA in Jerusalem; asking him about UNRWA schools. I specifically asked him on pensioned teachers, and he revealed that there is a fund called the "Providence Fund". This fund is now under the Pension Department of the United Nations and they charge employees on the salary for the pension fund. This peculiarity stems from the whole organization of UNRWA, which employs permanent staff.

Formally, UNRWA is a temporary organisation and its mandate is renewed every three years; therefore, it is not supposed to have permanent employees. Let's take the example of UNHCR, which deals with refugees all over the world: UNHCR has a core of permanent workers, and all the rest work on a 1 to 3 year contracts. There is no such thing as permanent employer in a humanitarian organisation, which should deal with emergencies and, therefore, temporary situations.

Then, one can say that UNRWA has become a UN agency for Palestinians only.

As I said, UNRWA employs people permanently, and that is a scandal, but there is even more. If you consider the staff, it is blatant that UNRWA is not an international organisation; it is a *de facto* a Palestinian organisation.

It employs about 30,000 people, who are all Palestinians, while it has a core of 120 internationals. All top positions are Palestinians: the economists, education specialists, doctors, health specialists, policy makers are all Palestinians.

Can you really call it an international organisation?

Many organizations work in the Palestinian Territories. How does UNRWA relate to them?

It is indeed interesting to see how UNRWA cooperates or not with other institutions. I will give an example.

The European Union built a hospital in Gaza, known as the European Gaza Hospital. For 5 years it has stood empty: UNRWA did not allow it to open, because there was a fight with the EU. UNRWA argued that the hospital was located in a refugee camp, and therefore it should be under the jurisdiction of UNRWA, and for 5 years did not allow EU to operate. Eventually, UNRWA had to capitulate and now the Palestinian Ministry of Health runs it.

UNRWA wants to retain absolute control over the territories designated as refugee camps.

Also with regards to the Palestinian National Authority?

To answer this, I have to tell something first. Last year, I happened to read the financial and audit annual report of UNRWA, which listed as assets 250 million dollars in land. Now, is land to be considered an asset by an international organization? Does UNRWA own land in Gaza, or Syria? Obviously, when they refer to land, they mean the territories designated as refugee camps. However, a refugee camp is not land owned by UNRWA, which nonetheless does not allow anyone to operate in these territories.

That is why I call UNRWA a "non-territorial State". There is no other international organization that controls territory. Actually, it functions as a State. UNRWA does not have a

police force, so they cannot enforce the law in those territories which they call refugee camps, which are actually towns.

Since they do not have municipal institution, refugee camps do not pay taxes; yet, all apartments and real estate in designated areas under UNRWA control are sold in open markets.

So how are refugee camps organized in terms of governance?

UNRWA claims that there are local committees administering law and order, but, actually, it is Hamas administering the camps in Gaza.

UNRWA is not a municipal authority. When you want to build a house or to open a business, who gives you the authorization? Nobody. It is anarchy. They say there are local committees, but who elects them? According to what procedures? What are their competences? Who are these committees accountable to? Who control them? Ugly enough, the answer is that, in Gaza, it is Hamas, whereas in other places there are gangs.

You mean it is a state of anarchy?

If you visit a refugee camp, you will see that they are totally urban neighbourhoods. And that it is complete chaos, because there is no administrating body. UNRWA does not allow anybody to administer the camps. And that has significant repercussions on the population resident in the camps.

Lebanon is the only place where you have the original 1948 residents, whereas in Palestine the situation is substantially different. Four years ago, after days of violence in the refugee camps in Lebanon, some humanitarian organisations intervened in the recovery phase with post-emergency actions. They discovered that there are 200,000 refugees living in the camps. According to UNRWA, the number is 400,000. How come UNRWA doubled the number of the residents?

The answer is quite easy. UNRWA gives free health care, free education, and freely distributes food; therefore, many people move to the camps and use UNRWA services.

Don't people need a document attesting their Palestinian refugee status recognized by UNRWA?

Sure. There are refugee cards, which are sold in the free market. Many new cards are fabricated, because they are easy to falsify.

For the last 10 years, UNRWA has been asked to issue biometric cards, but they have always refused.

Moreover, UNRWA has never held a census. Instead, they use the PNA census, which is indeed reliable for the whole Palestinian community, but not when it comes to the issue of refugees. For the purpose of the census, PNA official just ask people to state verbally if they are refugees or descendants, without any kind of verification.

Even more awkward is the fact that UNRWA does not hold any list of the deceased, which obviously has consequences on the census and on the use of the UNRWA cards.

As you said, UNRWA is a temporary organization, so how come it perpetuates its mandate? Moreover, UNRWA is a humanitarian organization, so how come its mandate has been diverted to other non-humanitarian goals?

There was a report written in 1948 by Folke Bernadotte, the first UN appointed mediator for settling disputes between Israelis and Arabs after the 1948 War. He blamed the League of Nations, the organization existing between the two World Wars, for the Palestinian refugees' problem. He claimed that the League of Nations denied Palestinians self-determination but gave Jewish self-determination. Consequently, he concluded that the UN, taking over the duties of the League of Nations, has to take care of the Palestinians until they achieve self-determination.

This is the essence of UNRWA: we are here discussing UNRWA, because it has been tasked by the international community with taking care of the Palestinians.

However, I would like to stress that UNRWA's mandate is not humanitarian but political, and they do not deny it; on the contrary, they repeatedly emphasize that they will exist until Palestine will achieve self-determination.

The 1992 Declaration of Principles, signed in White House by Rabin and Arafat, gave birth to the Palestinian Authority. As a first step toward Palestinian self-determination, UNRWA was consequently requested to prepare a dismantling report, which UNRWA buried somewhere and nobody knows about it.

They did not do anything to fulfil the request. In 2000, with the outburst of the so-called Second Intifada, everything was put on hold and the request for UNRWA dissolution was held off.

How did the Palestinian react to the request for dissolution of UNRWA?

The Palestinians themselves want UNRWA to dissolve. They themselves say clearly and loudly that they do not need UNRWA.

The Palestinian Authority functions as a government: it has ministers, deputies, offices, schools, hospitals, services, and, last but not the least, a police force. Why do they need UNRWA? Palestinians feel insulted by the UN.

To be blunt, I believe UNRWA helped the rise of Hamas, because UNRWA actually undermines the Palestinian Authority. UNRWA runs almost 1000 schools, then add the hospitals and other services. As a matter of fact, UNRWA competes with the Palestinian Authority for money, for grants, for international funding, and for development projects.

It sounds like part of Palestine is under protectorate.

Indeed, it is. It is a slap in the face to the Palestinians!

UNRWA is not just a Palestinian or Israeli concern. UNRWA is bad for everybody but even in Israel, there are supporters of UNRWA. The only ones who support UNRWA are the military, which claim, "We prefer to deal with UNRWA than with the Hamas." But it's not how it works. The reality on the ground is that UNRWA doesn't do anything without the approval of the Hamas.

You mentioned already a sort of relations between UNRWA and Hamas. Could you elaborate?

When I say that UNRWA undermines the Palestinian Authority, I mean that UNRWA receives funding that could go to the Palestinian Authority. UNRWA shows Palestinians that their government is weak, or incompetent, or vacant. Therefore, in my opinion, Hamas benefitted from this situation for gathering consensus.

UNRWA in Gaza is Hamas. Nothing in Gaza moves without the approval of Hamas. They do not officially cooperate, but they have to. UNRWA does not check people's affiliation when they hire their employees. So whom do you think they hire among those thousands of people? They run the camps without an enforcing agency. So who do you think acts as the real ruler in the camps in Gaza? It is the Hamas.

UNRWA has been accused of letting its schools being run by terrorists or terrorist-affiliated officials, with the result of letting anti-Israeli hatred spread. Is this how UNRWA exacerbates the conflict?

UNRWA does not have a special curriculum; therefore, UNRWA teaches the local curriculum approved by the State where they operate, including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority. The PNA officially supervises school curricula, but in Gaza it is Hamas defining school curricula. Then, what do you think they teach? UNRWA also said they add to the curriculum the Holocaust, but it is doubtful.

Furthermore, UNRWA boycotts Israeli companies.

Not only this, there is something else even more unscrupulous and shocking: UNRWA produces its own future clients, by not applying any family planning program to the territories it controls.

The UN has a family planning programme, which represents one of the major pillars of UN action. Family planning and sex education are primary action-lines of the United Nations, especially in developing countries.

The UN and the World Health Organization sometimes practices not mere family planning, but proper birth control. In 1960s, for example, the UN and the WHO helped with sterilizing women in India; men were offered transistor radios in exchange for sterilization. There was a big scandal about it.

The UN has a policy of family planning, with different regional priorities, implemented in the world by its agencies, except UNRWA. If you take a look at the chart of population growth in Arab countries, including territories administered by the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA, the lack of family planning is evident. UNRWA-controlled territories report the highest growth rate in the world, amounting to 35% per 10 years, which is 3.5% per year. The population growth rate in the Palestinian community not supported by UNRWA is 2.5% per year. In Egypt, it drops to 1.5%.

UNRWA is thus creating its clients. If this situation will continue, in only 10 years, we will have 10 million people asking for the right of return, with UNRWA-released refugee cards.

Not only this, but it also means to support Hamas, which rules over territories administered by UNRWA. Essentially, it means supporting the birth of children inducted into Hamas ideology; ultimately, it means strengthening Hamas.

You mentioned UNRWA boycotts Israel? How?

UNRWA does not call for the boycott of Israel. UNRWA *de facto* boycotts Israel because it does not allow Israeli organizations and companies to participate in tenders for construction, water, goods, or agricultural products.

Once I raised this issue, because the UN cannot exclude one nation from its activities. Personally, I have seen just one advertisement in Israeli newspapers of a tender for companies that manufacture school products. Some Israeli company applied for the tender, but obviously they did not win.

UNRWA may say that Israelis cannot work in Gaza, because of the conflict with Hamas, but they can find the way to use Israeli products; actually, there is economic cooperation between Israel and Gaza, so there is a way they can find to allow Israelis operate in Gaza. Moreover, this is not a real valid reason. This exclusion has been going on for over 60 years, long before Hamas took power.

The existence of UNRWA perpetuates the refugee problem and their claim to the right of return, which Israel denies for protecting its Jewish character. This argument is quite weak. How do you think Israel should deal with it?

Let's start with a simple fact: they are not refugees. They have resettled within the areas designated to the Palestinian Authority or in other Arab countries. If Lebanon, for example, refuses to naturalize them, then Palestinians should blame Lebanese authorities.

They are still considered refugees by UNRWA, because of political reasons and because they claim the right of return.

Now, people argue that Israel should deny the right of return of Palestinian refugees because it would jeopardize its Jewish nature. Indeed, Palestinians do not care about the Jewish nature of Israel and actually there is no reason why they should. The major argument to deny their right to return is legal. There is no such right of return for the third and fourth and now fifth generations.

This is recognized only for Palestinians. No other son or grandson of a refugee in the world claims the right to return. Were it a general rule, I also would be entitled to claim my alleged right to return to Poland from where my parents escaped. Almost three fourths of Israel's population would be the entitled to claim the right of return to Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Slovakia; not to mention the refugees from Arab countries: hundreds of thousands of Israelis would be entitled to claim the right of return to Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Egypt. Is that sustainable?

You imply that the dismantlement of UNRWA will lead not only to an improvement of the Palestinian situation, but also to the betterment of the relations between Israel and the Palestinians. What can be done?

There is a need for a joint action that questions national and international funding of UNRWA. The EU and European countries separately are the major financial supporters of UNRWA. They could question its mandate and pressure the UN for dismantling this agency, which not only has long been obsolete, but whose presence also exacerbates the conflict and thwarts the real self-determination of Palestinians.

Some EU States are members of UNRWA Advisory Committee, so you could start from there. But starting with cutting the funding should be the primary objective.

New media and social networks prove to be successful in political mobilization. What about an international Internet campaign?

I guess it would be a good idea.

I would like to point out something, which may not be clear. I am in no way against helping and supporting Palestinians. I believe, however, that this is just not the right way to help them. Do you want to build a hospital? Give the money to the Health Ministry of the Palestinian Authority. Do you want to build a school? Give money to the Education Ministry. It is fundamental to work with the Palestinian Authority, which may implement projects under supervision of the funding authority. Why do Palestinians need an intermediary such as UNRWA?

Even if you consider the problem with Hamas, this is not a good enough a reason why UNRWA should be working for decades, with the result of reinvigorating Hamas. As I said UNRWA runs schools according to the local curriculum, and in Gaza it is the Hamas curriculum they teach in UNRWA schools!

Even more puzzling is the fact that UNRWA has a donation website, where you can become “a friend of UNRWA” and donate directly. Additionally, they have also established a lobbying office in Washington.

In conclusion, it seems that UNRWA has very long-term plans. It wants to exist forever, and they perpetuate the myth of the millions of Palestinian refugees to support their own existence desires.