

February 6, 2018

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

As Christian denominations and organizations concerned about and working in the Middle East, we are writing to express our dismay at the recent decision to withhold \$65 million in U.S. funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The humanitarian impact of these cuts will be devastating. Many of our agencies and local partners know firsthand the important role that UNRWA plays in providing assistance to Palestine refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. More than half a million Palestinian children are educated in UNRWA schools. Half of Gaza's population receive food assistance from UNRWA. Hundreds of thousands of people each year rely on health services provided by UNRWA clinics. These already-vulnerable communities will be forced to suffer even more if these unconscionable cuts are not restored.

Secondly, we are deeply concerned by the politicization of humanitarian aid that is evident in this decision. The U.S. government has long maintained that "a hungry child knows no politics" and while this has not always been carried out perfectly, it has remained as an important guideline for U.S. policymakers. Humanitarian aid must be provided to civilians on the basis of need alone, not used as a way to attempt to extract concessions from political leaders. We are also concerned that this action could lead to a trend toward politicizing humanitarian aid to other vulnerable communities around the world and would erode U.S. reliability and credibility internationally.

Thirdly, the effort to withhold funds from UNRWA appears to be part of a series of actions to deny basic rights to Palestinians—in this case, their fundamental rights as refugees under international law. We yearn deeply for the day when UNRWA will no longer need to exist, but this must be the result of a negotiated resolution of the conflict, based on international law, that is fair and just for both Palestinians and Israelis. It cannot come through unilateral decisions by the United States to deny the rights of Palestinians.

We stand ready to work with you and all who seek a more just and peaceful future for *all* peoples in the region. In the meantime, we urge you to restore immediately full U.S. funding to UNRWA.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Baptists
American Friends Service Committee

Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
Office of Social Justice; Christian Reformed Church
Pax Christi International
Pax Christi USA
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Reformed Church in America
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

cc: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson
U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley
Members of the U.S. Senate
Members of the U.S. House of Representatives
UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl