

UN alarmed as US cuts Palestine aid



A Palestinian man stands next to a cart carrying a flour sack distributed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Khan Younis refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip (Reuters)

"The US has announced it will contribute \$60 million to the programme budget. There is for the moment no other indication of possible funding. This dramatically reduced contribution results in the most severe funding crisis in the history of the agency,"

-Chris Gunness,
UNRWA spokesman

"The freeze amounted to "cruelty" toward an "innocent and vulnerable population."

-Hanan Ashrawi,
A senior member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation

"At stake is the access of 525,000 boys and girls in 700 UNRWA schools, and their future,"

-Pierre Krahenbuhl,
UNRWA chief

"UNRWA is not a Palestinian institution, but a UN institution,"

-Antonio Guterres,
UN Secretary General



Palestine PLO-NAD @nadplo

Replying to @nadplo

The U.S. Administration seems to be following Netanyahu's instructions to gradually dismantle the one agency that was established by the international community to protect the rights of the Palestinian refugees and provide them with essential services. #Palestine #UNRWA

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The UN has expressed serious concern at the US decision to withhold more than half of a tranche of funding for the agency supporting Palestinian refugees.

Washington will hand over \$60m (£43m) of a planned payment to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), but keep back \$65m until it carries out "reforms".

UN Secretary General António Guterres said it could be forced to cut health care, education and social services.

Millions of refugees' dignity and human security were at stake, UNRWA said.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) accused the US of "targeting the most vulnerable segment of the Palestinian people".

Earlier this month, President Donald Trump threatened to cut aid to the Palestinians over what he called their unwillingness to

negotiate with Israel.

On Sunday, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas sharply attacked Mr Trump's peace efforts, saying he would no longer accept the US as a mediator following its controversial recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The US is the largest single donor to UNRWA, providing \$368m in 2016 and funding almost 30% of its operations to help some five million refugees across the Middle East.

On Tuesday, US state department spokeswoman Heather Nauert told reporters that the Trump administration had committed to a voluntary contribution of \$60m for 2018, so that Unrwa did not run out of funds and schools and health care facilities would not have to close.

An additional \$65m of funding would be "held for future consideration" but not

cancelled, she said.

Ms Nauert explained that the US would "like to see some revisions made in how Unrwa operates", to ensure that the money was "best spent" so that people got the services they needed.

UNRWA Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl, warned that the agency was "now confronted with the most dramatic financial crisis" in its 69-year history.

"Given the long, trusted, and historic relationship between the United States and UNRWA, this reduced contribution threatens one of the most successful and innovative human development endeavours in the Middle East," he said.

"At stake is the access of 525,000 boys and girls in 700 Unrwa schools, and their future," he said.

"At stake is the dignity and human security of millions of

Palestine refugees, in need of emergency food assistance and other support in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"At stake is the access of refugees to primary health care, including pre-natal care and other life-saving services."

Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the PLO's executive committee, accused the Trump administration of seeking to "dismantle" UNRWA at Israel's behest.

"This administration is thereby targeting the most vulnerable segment of the Palestinian people and depriving the refugees of the right to education, health, shelter and a dignified life," she said.

"It is also creating conditions that will generate further instability throughout the region and will demonstrate that it has no compunction in targeting the innocent." (BBC)

Raids across Germany target Iranian spies

German authorities on Tuesday conducted searches of homes and businesses belonging to 10 suspected Iranian spies.

The Federal Prosecutors Office ordered the searches after receiving a tip from Germany's domestic intelligence agency.

The suspects are believed to have spied on persons and institutions "on behalf of an intelligence entity associated with Iran," the prosecutor's office said.

No arrests were made during the raids, which were carried out in Baden-Württemberg, North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria and Berlin.

The German

magazine Focus, which first reported on the searches, said that the 10 individuals were suspected members of the al-Quds Brigade, the external operations arm of the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC).

Iranian agents are believed to regularly spy on Israelis, Jewish institutions, Iranian dissidents and other targets abroad.

Focus reported that the 10 persons are suspected of spying on Israeli and Jewish targets.

Germany authorities have not confirmed the report.

Long history of espionage

Earlier this month, Germany summoned Iran's ambassador



in Berlin after a 31-year-old Pakistani student was convicted of spying for Iran on Social Democratic Party (SPD) politician Reinhold Robbe.

Robbe was the former head of the German-Israel Friendship Society.

The Islamic Republic and its Lebanese Shiite ally, Hezbollah, have long been accused of

carrying out multiple deadly attacks on Jewish and Israeli targets abroad.

Last April, federal prosecutors filed charges against two men suspected of spying on the opposition People's Mujahedin of Iran (MEK) on behalf of Iranian intelligence.

The Paris-based MEK seeks to overthrow Iran's theocratic government and is widely disliked inside the country, where it is labeled a terrorist organization. The Iranian government blamed the group for stirring up unrest earlier this month.

Formerly listed as a terrorist organization by the EU and

United States, the MEK has also been accused of carrying out covert operations on behalf of Israel and the United States.

Iran has been linked to the assassination of multiple dissidents, mostly Kurds and MEK members, throughout Europe.

In 1992, four Iranian-Kurdish opposition leaders were assassinated in a Berlin restaurant by Iranian agents.

The assassination in Berlin, and another three years earlier against Kurdish dissidents in Austria, occurred at a time when the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan was leading a low-level insurgency in Iran. (DW)