

March 25, 2019

Dear Members of Congress:

We are writing as church communions and organizations, many with a long history of involvement and work in the Middle East. Over the past year we have witnessed the negative impacts of the Trump administration's decision to cut funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and to withhold bilateral Economic Support Funds (ESF) for the West Bank and Gaza.

The vital services and programs provided by UNRWA and through ESF funds to the region include food assistance, health care, education and clean water. As a result of the cut-off of funds, we are receiving reports that classrooms are more crowded, food assistance has been reduced and some medical services such as dialysis treatments have been suspended or are no longer available. The humanitarian situation in Gaza, including the lack of clean water and electricity, is particularly dire and has been exacerbated by the reduction in U.S. funding.

Denying basic services to vulnerable populations will not bring about peace and security for anyone in the region. Furthermore, humanitarian assistance must be provided on the basis of need alone; it is unconscionable and against universally-agreed humanitarian principles to withhold aid to extract concessions from political leaders. We are greatly concerned by the Administration's trend toward politicizing humanitarian assistance globally.

We yearn deeply for the day when UNRWA will no longer need to exist and when Palestinian communities will no longer need humanitarian assistance. But this can only result from a negotiated resolution of the conflict that is fair and just for both Palestinians and Israelis, including an end to Israeli military occupation.

Congress has consistently appropriated funds for UNRWA and bilateral ESF assistance to the West Bank and Gaza in previous fiscal years. We strongly support the disbursement of these funds as intended and the inclusion of this funding in the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations process.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
Church World Service
Churches for Middle East Peace
Conference of Major Superiors of Men (Catholic)
Dept. of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
The Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, Church of the Brethren
Office of Social Justice, Christian Reformed Church in North America
Pax Christi International
Pax Christi USA
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Reformed Church in America
The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
Unitarian Universalist Association