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UNRWA-US agreement threatens Palestinian right to self-defence, and refugees' right of return

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) condemns in the strongest possible terms the recently-announced [agreement](#) between the US and the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees ([UNRWA](#)). Palestinian refugees must be provided proper aid, without arbitrary limits being put on their right to defend themselves against foreign aggression, or the abrogation of their right to return – both of which the new arrangement between UNRWA and the US threatens.

[UNRWA](#) was founded in the wake of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their lands in 1948, known as '[al-Nakba](#)' (or 'the catastrophe') by Palestinians. The Nakba was one of the founding events of the state of Israel. UNRWA's initial role was to provide aid for the 750,000 Palestinians forced from their lands – a number which only grew in the decades that followed.

Under President [Trump](#), the US first reduced and after entirely cut all funding to UNRWA (the European Union, the second largest contributor maintained its own funding). Under the new administration funding has resumed, though not to the pre-2018 level – and with several strings attached.

Called the '[Framework for Cooperation](#)', the new agreement between UNRWA and the US, sets limits on how the UNRWA spends the money given to it by the US.

The new framework means UNRWA will have to share all of the information it gathers on those refugees receiving aid with the US, and, will prevent any current and even former members of groups such as Palestine Liberation Army, the military wing of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), from receiving aid.

The Framework [document](#) read: "The US will not make any contributions to UNRWA except on the condition that UNRWA takes all feasible measures to ensure that no



part of the US contribution is used to assist any refugee receiving military training as a member of the so-called Palestinian Liberation Army or any other guerrilla organization or has participated in any terrorist act.”

However, such groups and individuals are legitimate expressions of Palestinian society, and of Palestinians’ struggle for freedom from historic and ongoing Israeli aggression against them. The agreement makes UNRWA into a client of the US and Israel, and politicises what is a fundamentally humanitarian question – the well-being of refugees.

What is more, there is no mention in the document of Palestinians’ right of return, as is their legal right under international law.

Earlier this week, a sit-in protest was held at the UN’s headquarters in Gaza against the new arrangement.

For all those reasons, [AOHR UK](http://www.aohr.org.uk) expresses its strong support for those protests, and utterly condemns this new attempt to stifle the legitimate demands for freedom and return from Palestinians.

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