



Date: 09/05/2025

## **Israel Closes UNRWA Schools in Jerusalem as Part of a Broader Campaign to Systematically Undermine Palestinian Rights Under the Pretext of Law**

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) stated that on the morning of May 8, 2025, Israeli occupation forces stormed six schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in East Jerusalem. Troops ordered the immediate evacuation of all staff and students, blocking their access to the premises. This aggressive move was part of pre-issued closure directives from Israeli authorities. It involved heavily armed police, officials from the Ministry of Education, and municipal staff who surrounded and cordoned off the schools—a clear attempt to force the UN agency to halt its educational services in the city through coercion and fear.

UNRWA confirmed that over 550 children, aged between 6 and 15, were present during the raid, along with their teachers and administrative staff. The incident caused widespread panic and distress among the children, who now face the abrupt loss of their right to education with only weeks remaining in the academic year. UNRWA described the Israeli actions as a serious violation of the privileges



and immunities granted to UN institutions, and a flagrant breach of international conventions that safeguard education in times of conflict.

AOHR UK added that this latest military escalation, along with previous threats, is part of a broader and accelerating Israeli strategy aimed at dismantling UNRWA's presence in Jerusalem. These efforts intensified in October 2024, when the Israeli Knesset passed two laws barring the agency from operating within areas claimed as Israeli “sovereign territory.” These laws revoked all privileges previously granted to the agency and prohibited any official engagement with it. They followed years of political incitement and systematic efforts to undermine the agency’s credibility, particularly since 2000 when dismantling UNRWA became a permanent item on the agenda of the annual Herzliya Conference on Israeli strategic planning.

AOHR UK explained that Israel’s assault on UNRWA is not a recent development. It began in earnest after the Oslo Accords, when efforts were launched to undermine the agency’s status as an international witness to the Nakba and a legal custodian of Palestinian refugee rights. During the Trump administration, large portions of UNRWA’s funding were cut as part of a broader campaign to eliminate international responsibility toward Palestinian refugees and to pave the way for erasing the right of return.

The closure of schools in Jerusalem does not merely threaten the education of 1,100 students. It also paves the way for more extensive measures targeting



UNRWA's healthcare clinics, community centres, and other vital services—leaving tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees in Jerusalem without access to basic rights and services, in the midst of the agency's worsening financial crisis.

More than 550 staff members work at UNRWA's Jerusalem office. Many hold West Bank IDs and have been banned from entering their workplaces since October 2023, forcing them to work remotely from scattered locations. As the assault intensifies, these employees face mounting uncertainty, job insecurity, and a lack of any practical protection or contingency planning from either the UN or the Palestinian Authority.

Despite these pressures, UNRWA continues to deliver essential humanitarian and development services to millions of Palestinian refugees. It operates 702 schools serving over 543,000 students across the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan—including 46,000 students in the West Bank alone. The agency also provides primary healthcare services to more than 1.9 million refugees, supports 400,000 individuals through its social safety net, and offers microfinance loans to small businesses. UNRWA remains the sole UN body mandated to support Palestinian refugees and currently oversees services in 58 official refugee camps.

AOHR UK emphasised that Israel's targeting of UNRWA—whether through legislation, military action, or media campaigns—poses a direct and existential threat to the agency. These actions are part of a larger agenda to erase the



Palestinian refugee question and shield Israel from accountability for its original crime: the mass displacement and forced expulsion of Palestinians in 1948.

AOHR UK also strongly condemned the decisions by several Western governments to suspend their funding to UNRWA in recent months, citing false Israeli allegations involving a small number of staff members in connection with the events of October 7. Despite the fact that only 12 employees were accused out of more than 30,000, and despite the absence of verifiable evidence, many governments responded by cutting vital support. Although some have since resumed funding, this earlier decision remains a dangerous signal of the fragility of international commitment to refugee rights—and the ease with which it can be swayed by Israeli political pressure.

AOHR UK called on the international community to uphold its legal and moral obligations by taking immediate action to protect UNRWA's continued presence in Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories, ensure the agency's uninterrupted operations, and hold Israel accountable for repeated violations of UN immunities and its denial of children's right to education.

AOHR UK further urged Arab and Islamic states—and all nations committed to justice for the Palestinian people—to move beyond silence and symbolism, and to take tangible steps to provide independent, stable political and financial support to UNRWA. The agency must be preserved as a cornerstone of international responsibility, and as a living witness to the Nakba and the ongoing struggle of millions of Palestinian refugees.



Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK  
المنظمة العربية لحقوق الإنسان في بريطانيا

## Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK