

## **Bond IOPT Humanitarian Working Group statement: 19/07/24**

**We are relieved that the new UK Government has reinstated funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the main aid provider for millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the region.** This decision comes at a critical time during a worsening humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. The population faces extreme challenges, including the risk of starvation, disease, and the impact of ongoing bombardment and lack of aid. **As the Foreign Secretary outlined, civilians in Gaza are trapped in hell on earth.**

The Foreign Secretary rightly notes that UNRWA is absolutely essential to aid efforts. No other agencies can deliver aid at the scale needed, providing vital services to Gazans and Palestinian refugees in the region. We are pleased that the UK has been sufficiently reassured by UNRWA's efforts to ensure they meet the highest standards of neutrality and strengthen its procedures, including on vetting. The funding suspensions, which should have been reversed long ago, risked depriving millions of civilians, including over a million children, of the essential assistance they desperately need.

This announcement should be supported by multi-year commitments to fund UNRWA, alongside renewed **political** support for its [mandate](#), which derives from the UN General Assembly, to provide assistance to Palestinians, including Palestinian refugees, until a just solution to their plight is achieved in accordance with International Law. Humanitarian funding should not be used as a sticking plaster to circumvent international responsibilities.

**As the Foreign Secretary also outlined, Israel promised a flood of aid back in April, but imposes impossible and unacceptable restrictions.** Aid is not enough when systemic barriers, like the [complete destruction of UNRWA headquarters in Gaza](#), the targeting of [nearly 70% of UNRWA schools](#), or the killing of nearly 200 of UNRWA's staff since the beginning of the war, prevent aid workers, emergency responders and medics from performing their life-saving work. **More aid workers have been killed throughout this conflict than in every conflict globally, combined.**

The UK must hold Israel accountable for these systemic attacks. The UK's approach must be to uphold international law, address the occupation, prevent atrocity crimes, and apply effective political pressure to end Israel's bombardment and restrictions on humanitarian aid delivery. With journalists banned from entering, aid agencies are also a vital source of information, and their reports are devastating. **We look forward to the new UK Government continuing to counteract efforts to undermine the UN, humanitarian, and human rights organisations, including ensuring the free entry of experts and protecting the integrity of disseminated information.**

**We hope that reinstating funding to UNRWA signals turning the corner,** and urge the new UK Government to take proactive steps to address the catastrophe in Gaza, in light of potential genocide. The UK must continue to align with UN positions and the consensus of the international community to restore its capacity for leadership and rebuild its international reputation. This includes adhering to decisions of international

courts, including the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) fulfilling legal obligations, and holding the Government of Israel accountable for alleged serious violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL). **We welcome the new UK Government's assessment of the Government of Israel's compliance with International Law and look forward to the publishing of this assessment. We urge the UK to immediately suspend arms licences and exports to the Government of Israel.**

It is time to let UNRWA do its job, support the UN, NGOs, CSOs, emergency responders, medics and all of civil society to operate in Gaza, and work together towards a ceasefire.