

January 24, 2018

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable James N. Mattis
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

The Honorable Nikki Haley
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations
United States Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster
National Security Advisor
National Security Council
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Tillerson, Secretary Mattis, Ambassador Haley and General McMaster,

As leaders of organizations deeply involved in programs and advocacy surrounding international humanitarian response, we write to object in the strongest of terms to the decision to withhold \$65 million of the planned United States contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

We are deeply concerned by the humanitarian consequences of this decision on life-sustaining assistance to children, women and men in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Whether it is emergency food aid, access to primary healthcare, access to primary education, or other critical support to vulnerable populations, there is no question that these cuts, if maintained, will have dire consequences.

We are particularly alarmed that this decision impacting humanitarian aid to civilians is not based on any assessment of need, but rather designed both to punish Palestinian political leaders and to force political concessions from them. This is simply unacceptable as a rationale for denying civilians humanitarian assistance, and a dangerous and striking departure from U.S. policy on international humanitarian assistance.

In 1984, in justifying its decision to provide humanitarian aid to famine-affected Ethiopia, the Reagan Administration declared that “a hungry child knows no politics,” and, indeed, this sentiment has guided U.S. policy makers for decades.

This sentiment is, for example, reflected in the international Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, an inter-governmental donor forum and network that the United States helped to establish during the Administration of George W. Bush. That Initiative includes best practices that the Bush administration and subsequent administrations have endorsed, including the propositions that “humanitarian action should be guided by ... the centrality of saving human lives and alleviating suffering wherever it is found,” and that humanitarian assistance

to vulnerable populations should be “solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected population.”

To be sure, application of these objectives by U.S. administrations has been imperfect, but all U.S. administrations have aspired to them, and it is deeply troubling to witness such a casual disregard of principles that have been crucial to U.S. policy deliberations over many decades. We hope sincerely that you will reconsider this unfortunate decision, which we believe undermines critically important values as well as U.S. leadership around the world.

Sincerely,

Joyce Ajlouny
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

J Ron Byler
Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Sean Callahan
President and CEO
Catholic Relief Services

Joel Charny
Director
Norwegian Refugee Council USA

Sarah Costa
Executive Director
Women’s Refugee Commission

Halil Demir
Executive Director
Zakat Foundation of America

Mark Hetfield
President & CEO
HIAS

Margaret Huang
Executive Director
Amnesty International USA

Mohamed S. Idris
Executive Director
American Relief Agency for the Horn of Africa

Neal Keny-Guyer
Chief Executive Officer
Mercy Corps

Anwar Ahmad Khan
President
Islamic Relief US

Abby Maxman
President and CEO
Oxfam America

Rev. John L. McCullough
President and CEO
Church World Service

Giulia McPherson
Interim Executive Director
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

Carolyn Miles
President and CEO
Save the Children

David Miliband
President and CEO
International Rescue Committee

Eskinder Negash
Acting Chief Executive Officer
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

Michelle Nunn
President and CEO
CARE USA

Eric Schwartz
President
Refugees International

David A. Weiss
President & CEO
Global Communities

Samuel A. Worthington
Chief Executive Officer
InterAction