Israel Demands UN Response Following Gaza Tunnel Discovery

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<http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Israel-demands-UN-response-following-Gaza-tunnel-discovery-496429>

Israel on Friday called on the UN to “strongly and unequivocally condemn Hamas” and formally classify the group a “terrorist organization” following the [discovery of a tunnel that runs beneath two UN Relief and Works Agency schools](http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/UNRWA-discovers-Hamas-tunnel-under-Gaza-schools-496394) in the Gaza Strip.

In a letter to the president of the Security Council, Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon demanded that “this time, the international community must not turn a blind eye toward such cynical exploitation” of civilian infrastructure in Gaza by Hamas.

UN Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov posted the following message on Twitter on Saturday: “Despicable to risk the lives of children! Hamas must end illicit arms buildup and militant activity in Gaza.”

UNRWA’s announcement of the discovery of the tunnels came a day after US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley visited an UNRWA school in the Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem.

“It is of the utmost importance that the council ensures that all UN-affiliated agencies, and especially UNRWA, remain neutral and safeguarded from abuse by terrorist organizations,” read the letter.

Danon wrote that the discovery of this tunnel was not an “isolated incident, but rather the latest of deeply concerning attempts by Hamas terrorists to systematically exploit the organs of the UN.” These efforts, he said, are “severely damaging” humanitarian efforts in Gaza.

According to a report that appeared in al-Monitor, Hamas denied it built the tunnel under the UN schools, and “strongly condemned” the UNRWA statement.

Hamas, according to the report, “clarified the issue with all factions and resistance forces, who clearly stated they had no actions related to the resistance in the said location.”

UNRWA has been the subject of considerable pressure in recent months. In February, allegations emerged that an UNRWA [employee](http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/UN-employee-resigns-amid-allegations-he-was-elected-to-Hamas-leadership-488653) had been elected to the Hamas political leadership. The individual in question was suspended by the organization and subsequently resigned.

And earlier this month, the UNRWA apologized after it was revealed that it had used a photo of a [Palestinian child](http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/UNRWA-sorry-for-using-Syria-photo-in-Gaza-campaign-494840) living in Syria for its fund-raising campaign in Gaza. The photo was later removed.