Report: Trump to Demand Recognized Palestinian Refugees Be Capped at Tenth of Current Number

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<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/report-trump-to-cap-palestinian-refugees-at-tenth-of-current-number-1.6412962>

The Trump administration is about to announce a change in policy regarding the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the UN agency responsible for assisting Palestinian refugees and their descendants in the Middle East, according to a report on Saturday in the Israel Television News Company, formerly known as Channel 2 News.

According to the News Company, a report that is set to be published by the administration at the beginning of September will cap the number of Palestinian refugees at half a million - about a tenth of the UN's number.

The News Company reported that the administration is expected to announce that it will not accept [UNRWA](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-what-is-unrwa-and-will-trump-really-defund-it-1.5630374)'s definition of a Palestinian refugee, which states that refugee status is passed from one generation to the next. In addition, the report said that the U.S. intends to freeze funding for the organization in the West Bank and to ask Israel to consider limiting its activities. The U.S. is the largest donor to UNRWA, and last year transferred more than 360 million dollars to the organization.

Senior American government officials have recently visited UNRWA several times. A senior Trump administration official [told Haaretz this month](https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-amid-tensions-with-abbas-white-house-says-unrwa-mandate-must-change-1.6343237)that "UNRWA’s mandate has perpetuated and exacerbated the refugee crisis and must be changed." The senior official also said that only a change in the organization's mandate would allow the Palestinians to "reach their full potential."

These remarks were made after a report that Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner, [pressured Jordan to strip the refugee status of the two million Palestinians](https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/kushner-worked-to-strip-status-of-palestinian-refugees-1.6341143) residing in the country.

In January, the U.S. [froze tens of millions of dollars it was scheduled to transfer to UNRWA](https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/u-s-freezes-half-of-aid-funds-to-un-palestinian-refugee-age-1.5742264).

In response, the [UN](https://www.haaretz.com/misc/tags/TAG-un-1.5598959) aid agency [enacted extensive cutbacks](https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/unrwa-begins-laying-off-workers-ahead-of-expected-cut-in-u-s-aid-1.5742386), including laying off dozens of teachers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank and about 100 workers in 13 refugee camps in Jordan. UNRWA's Commissioner-General [Pierre Krahenbuhl said](https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/unrwa-schools-for-palestinians-to-open-on-time-despite-u-s-cuts-1.6386997)that UNRWA "currently only has funding to run the agency’s services until the end of September. We need a further $217 million to ensure that our schools not only open but can be run until the end of the year.”

[Netanyahu’s bureau said in January](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israeli-official-netanyahu-backs-gradual-aid-cut-to-unrwa-1.5729537) that the prime minister “supports a critical approach by President Trump and believes that practical steps must be taken to change the situation in which UNRWA perpetuates the Palestinian refugee problem instead of resolving it.”

Israel has called to close down the agency in the past, claiming that it makes it possible for Arab countries to avoid taking in and absorbing Palestinian refugees and their descendants. In 2017, Netanyahu called on U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, to reexamine UNRWA’s existence, saying that the organization "perpetuates the Palestinian refugee problem" rather than resolving it and it should thus be dismantled and incorporated in other UN commissions.

On Friday, the Trump administration [announced that it has decided to cut $200 million from the aid budget to the Palestinians](https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/trump-administration-to-cut-200-million-from-palestinian-aid-1.6412298) that was approved by Congress earlier this year. Most of this money was supposed to support humanitarian and economic projects in the West Bank and Gaza, and was not meant to go directly to the Palestinian Authority.

After the announcement a U.S. State Department official said, "this decision takes into account the challenges the international community faces in providing assistance in Gaza, where Hamas control endangers the lives of Gaza’s citizens and degrades an already dire humanitarian and economic situation."

Congress originally approved $250 million for Palestinian aid for the current fiscal year. Out of that entire budget, the Trump administration has so far released tens of millions of dollars that went to support the Palestinian Authority's security forces. The rest of the money was being held as part of an internal administration "review" of aid to the Palestinians. Following the decision announced on Friday, it will be transferred to other places, which have not yet been specified.

The decision comes just days after [President Trump said that the Palestinians will "get something very good"](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-trump-israel-will-pay-a-price-for-jerusalem-decision-1.6408354) as part of the peace process, in return for his decision to move the American embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

Trump said that it is now the Palestinians' "turn to get something." The aid cut, however, is expected to further hurt the Trump administration's relationship with the Palestinian Authority.