UNRWA investigation: History shows United Nations incapable of investigating itself, experts say

February 11, 2024

By Benjamin Weinthal

Fox News

<https://www.foxnews.com/world/unrwa-investigation-history-shows-united-nations-incapable-of-investigating-itself-experts-say>

The [United Nations](https://www.foxnews.com/category/world/united-nations)' plan to investigate 12 United Nations Relief and Works Agency workers for participating in the Hamas massacre of 1,200 people in October, including the murders of over 30 Americans, got off to a rocky start because its inquiries are allegedly infected with severe incompetence, anti-Israel bias and corruption.

Last month, the UNRWA for Palestine Refugees in the Near East confirmed the content of an Israeli dossier that stated 12 of its workers participated in the Hamas terror invasion.

‘On the investigation into the alleged involvement of 12 UNRWA employees in the ([Oct. 7 terror attacks)](https://www.foxnews.com/category/world/terrorism) in Israel, as soon as UNRWA was told of this information by the Israel Foreign Ministry, the leadership of the agency took the swift action of terminating those involved,’ Stéphane Dujarric, spokesperson for U.N. secretary-general, told Fox News Digital.

Yet there are big question marks over the U.N.’s ability to investigate itself. The problem conjures the famous Latin phrase, Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? It is generally translated as ‘Who will guard the guards themselves?’

‘The investigation will be done by the U.N.’s Office of Internal Oversight Services (akin to an inspector general in a U.S. government department),’ Dujarric told Fox News Digital. ‘Should criminal behavior be found, it could be referred to the appropriate national law enforcement entity.

‘As far as the independent review is concerned, as you will see from the announcement we made earlier today, it is exactly that — independent. It is not staffed by the U.N. employees. It will be led by a former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, who will work alongside three independent Nordic research institutes. The final report will be made public once handed over to the secretary-general.’

Peter Gallo, an international lawyer and former Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) investigator at the U.N., told Fox News Digital his former employer ‘is as independent as my left kidney.’

Gallo, who has submitted testimony to [the U.S. Congress](https://www.foxnews.com/category/us/congress) about alleged U.N. corruption, criminality and mismanagement, described a case of the UN’s OIOS allegedly sweeping a massive medical fraud case under the rug in connection with Hamas’ ally, Hezbollah.

‘There was an investigation into medical insurance in Naqoura in south Lebanon, 2 km (1.2 miles) from the Israeli border,’ Gallo said. ‘They had something like 75 suspicious medical insurance claims. The company the U.N. used to administer medical insurance flagged these as suspicious. And they were putting claims in for powerful antibiotics, and there were no diagnostic tests.’

Gallo said to submit a fraudulent medical claim, ‘you need the complicity of a doctor or pharmacist.’

The U.N. sent investigators to Lebanon, and the Lebanese physician said he did not need to take tests, according to Gallo.

‘The OIOS did not bring a medical expert. And the office closed the cases and said no there is no fraud,’ Gallo said, expressing frustration the U.N. was ‘relying on testimony’ from ‘a co-conspirator.’

Gallo noted that a pharmacist involved in the case was a mayor of a Lebanese city and was affiliated with the U.S.-designated terrorist organization Hezbollah.

‘Were drugs going to Hezbollah and was money going to Hezbollah?’ Gallo asked. ‘I wrote to the under secretary of OIOS. They were not interested that there was an obvious Hezbollah connection.’

An additional case of the U.N. allegedly whitewashing terrorism cited by Gallo involved a scandal that [Fox News Digital reported on in 2015.](https://www.foxnews.com/world/millions-in-un-somalia-aid-diverted-hints-that-some-went-to-terrorists)

Edward Flaherty, an American lawyer who has represented whistleblowers throughout the U.N. system based in Geneva, Switzerland, told Fox News Digital that, in his years of experience, ‘OIOS and any internal investigation services of all the international organizations are not fit for purpose. They ultimately report to the executive, so are not independent and will never investigate the senior ranks for wrongdoing unless greenlighted by the executive — built-in protection.

‘They operate like Stalin's secret police chief, Lavrentiy Beria, ‘Show me the man, and I’ll find you a crime.' The only way to fix UN/IO investigations is to lift the immunity and let national police forces carry out investigations of serious misconduct or the misconduct of the investigators.’

When asked about the criticisms leveled by Gallo and others regarding the external investigation into UNRWA, Dujarric said, ’I would suggest that people reserve judgment on the independent review until it's completed. The final report will be made public, at which point people will be able to opine.’

When confronted with the criticism of the U.N. investigations, a [U.S. State Department](https://www.foxnews.com/category/politics/foreign-policy/state-department) spokesperson told Fox News Digital, ‘The United States has reached out to the government of Israel to seek more information about these allegations, and we have briefed members of Congress and their staffs. We welcome the decision by the U.N. to conduct an investigation and a ‘comprehensive and independent’ review of UNRWA, as well as Secretary-General Guterres’ pledge to take decisive action to respond, should the allegations prove accurate.

‘There must be complete accountability for anyone who participated in the heinous attacks of Oct. 7. We will remain in close contact with the United Nations and government of Israel regarding this matter.’

Anne Bayefsky, director of the Touro Institute on Human Rights and the Holocaust and president of Human Rights Voices, cast doubt on the integrity of the U.N. investigations.

‘What we have here is the usual U.N. concept of problem-solving — smoke and mirrors,’ she told Fox News Digital. ‘There will be two ‘parallel’ so-called investigations on UNRWA, one in which the U.N. investigates itself, and the other put together ‘in consultation with the UNRWA commissioner-general’ — the U.N. person in charge of the massive corruption himself.’

Bayefsky said the ‘description of the ‘independent’ review focuses on taking a look at ‘mechanisms’ and ‘procedures’ on ‘neutrality.’ That’s U.N.-speak for avoiding the rot at the heart of the matter. Which is systemic antisemitism throughout the UNRWA-run education system and a decades-long record of contributing to more racist intolerance and violence, rather than ending it.

‘Maybe that’s why the secretary-general’s ‘new and improved’ UNRWA investigation lists a group of Scandinavian consultants — and not the country on the front lines paying the heaviest price for UNRWA’s dangerous record — Israel.’

Fox News Digital reported Saturday that Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant said the number of UNRWA employees who carried out the massacre [now numbers ‘dozens.’](https://www.foxnews.com/world/israeli-defense-minister-dozens-unrwa-staff-took-part-hamas-oct-7-massacre) Gallant described UNRWA as ‘Hamas with a facelift.’

Fox News Digital reached out to UNRWA spokesperson Juliette Touma, who said, ‘I’m not able to comment on anything to do with OIOS’ and directed Fox News Digital to contact UNRWA’s New York office.

Fox News Digital's press queries to UNRWA’s New York and Washington D.C. offices were not immediately returned.