Dismissing review, Israel calls UNRWA ‘a poisoned, rotten tree whose roots are Hamas’

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-dismisses-review-calls-unrwa-a-poisoned-rotten-tree-whose-roots-are-hamas/>

The Foreign Ministry on Monday charged that Hamas’s penetration of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees is so deep that ‘it is impossible to say where UNRWA ends and Hamas begins,’ as a review of the organization’s links to terror was released.

The report [said](https://www.timesofisrael.com/unrwa-review-israel-hasnt-provided-evidence-that-agency-staff-were-terror-group-members/) Israel had yet to provide supporting evidence for its claims that a significant number of UNRWA staff were members of terrorist organizations. It also asserted that UNRWA had ‘robust’ policies in place to ensure staff neutrality, though acknowledged issues persist with compliance.

The review was led by former French foreign minister Catherine Colonna, who was appointed after Israel alleged that 12 UNRWA staff actively participated in the Hamas-led October 7 onslaught in which 1,200 people were killed and another 253 taken hostage, triggering the ongoing war in Gaza.

Israel subsequently claimed another 30 UNRWA staffers assisted or facilitated those crimes on October 7 and as much as 12 percent of the organization’s staff were affiliated with terror organizations.

‘If more than 2,135 UNRWA employees are members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and 1/5 of the principals of UNRWA schools are Hamas activists, the problem with UNRWA-Gaza is not a problem of a few bad apples,’ Foreign Ministry spokesman Oren Marmorstein said in a statement issued shortly before the report was released. ‘It is a poisoned and rotten tree whose roots are Hamas.’

The report ‘ignores the severity of the problem and offers cosmetic fixes,’ said the Foreign Ministry.

‘This is not what a true and comprehensive investigation looks like,’ said the statement.

‘This is what a desire to avoid the problem and not call it by its name looks like.’

The ministry also said that UNRWA was not part of the solution for Gaza and never will be, and that donor nations should direct their funds to other humanitarian organizations.

Israel’s allegations against the dozen UNRWA staff led 16 states to pause or suspend funding of $450 million to UNRWA, a blow to an agency grappling with the humanitarian crisis that has swept Gaza since Israel launched its offensive there.

Israel has long complained about the agency, founded in 1949 to care for Palestinian refugees. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called for UNRWA to be shut down, saying it is infested by terror elements and unjustly seeks to perpetrate the Palestinian refugee crisis.

UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini in March warned of ‘a deliberate and concerted campaign’ to end its operations. UNRWA employs 32,000 people across its area of operations, 13,000 of them in Gaza.

UNRWA says it terminated the contracts of 10 of the 12 staff accused by Israel of involvement in the October 7 attack, and that the other two are dead. A UN oversight body is leading a separate investigation into the Israeli allegations against those 12 staffers.