Report alleges ethical abuses at UN agency for Palestinians

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By Joe Dyke, [AFP](http://www.afp.com/)

Yahoo News

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/report-alleges-ethical-abuses-un-agency-palestinians-093700768.html>

An internal ethics report has alleged mismanagement and abuses of authority at the highest levels of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees even as the organisation faced an unprecedented crisis after US funding cuts.

The allegations included in the confidential report by the agency's ethics department are now being scrutinised by UN investigators.

The agency -- the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) -- said it is cooperating fully with the investigation and that it cannot comment in detail because the probe is ongoing.

AFP has obtained a copy of the report which describes "credible and corroborated" allegations of serious ethical abuses, including involving UNRWA's top official, Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl.

It says the allegations include senior management engaging in "sexual misconduct, nepotism, retaliation, discrimination and other abuses of authority, for personal gain, to suppress legitimate dissent, and to otherwise achieve their personal objectives."

One senior official named in the report has left the organisation due to "inappropriate behaviour" linked to the investigation, UNRWA said, while another has resigned for what the agency called "personal reasons."

UNRWA said in response to AFP questions that it "is probably among the most scrutinised UN agencies in view of the nature of the conflict and complex and politicised environment it is working in."

"Over the past 18 months, UNRWA has faced immense financial and political pressure, but its entire staff body has steered it, serving 5.4 million Palestine refugees through the most unprecedented financial crisis in its near 70 years of history," it said.

The report was sent to the United Nations secretary general in December and UN investigators have since visited UNRWA's offices in Jerusalem and Amman, collecting information related to the allegations, sources familiar with the matter said.

Krahenbuhl said in a statement to AFP that "if the current investigation -- once it is completed -- were to present findings that require corrective measures or other management actions, we will not hesitate to take them."

The agency provides schooling and medical services to millions of impoverished Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and the Palestinian territories.

It employs around 30,000 people, mostly Palestinians.

The report paints a picture of a small number of mostly foreign senior leaders centralising power and influence while disregarding UN checks and balances.

Krahenbuhl himself is alleged to have been romantically involved with a colleague who was appointed in 2015 to a newly created role of senior advisor to the commissioner-general after an "extreme fast-track" process, the report says.

This enabled her to join him on business class flights across the globe, the report claims.

In 2018 the United States suspended and later cut all funding for UNRWA, causing a financial crisis that threatened to see its schools and hospitals closed.

US President Donald Trump's administration, along with Israel, accuse UNRWA of perpetuating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The agency disputes that and says the vital services it provides would otherwise not be available to Palestinians who benefit from them.