

## **UNRWA MYTHS & FACTS**

*“UNRWA applies a unique standard to refugees, making refugees of their descendants”*

- Palestinian refugees are not distinct from other protracted refugee situations in this regard. Under international law, the children of refugees, whether or not the parents are stateless or lacking citizenship in another country, are also considered refugees.
- In fact, the majority of the world’s refugees live in protracted refugee situations. UNHCR also registers descending generational refugees including those from: Afghanistan, Angola, Bhutan, Burma, Burundi, Congo/DRC, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Tibet and Western Sahara.
- The principle of family unity and keeping families united and together is the reason that refugee parents provide refugee status to their children.
- In fact, UNRWA’s definition of a Palestinian refugee is narrower than UNHCR’s definition of a refugee. Under UNHCR’s definition, both women and men can pass on refugee status to their descendants, whereas only male refugees can pass on their status as refugees under UNRWA’s definition. Under UNHCR’s definition, many more Palestinians, located all over the world, would qualify as refugees.
- UNRWA’s refugee definition is determined only by the UN General Assembly and cannot be changed by UNRWA.

*“UNRWA perpetuates Palestinians’ refugee status”*

- All refugees exist due to a lack of a political solution. If UNRWA closed tomorrow, there would still be millions of Palestine refugees in the Middle East who would be stateless, without a legal identity, and unable to enjoy the full range of rights afforded to citizens. Moreover, these refugees would not be able to easily access education, health care, and other pertinent social services. UNRWA and its mandate can only be dissolved in the UN General Assembly. Even without full funding, UNRWA would still exist.

*“The Palestinians are not ‘refugees’ but are entitled to citizenship in the countries where they’ve lived for decades”*

- While neighboring states have absorbed Palestinian refugees over the years, most are not afforded lawful protection by any state, and in most host countries, are largely confined to refugee camps. In countries like Lebanon, for example, they are denied access to lawful employment and are barred from hospitals, including secondary and tertiary care.
- UNRWA does not have authority to normalize or locally integrate refugees hosted by Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. That is the responsibility of States.

*“UNRWA promotes the ‘Right of Return’ for Palestine refugees, whereas UNHCR has no such policy”*

- The “right of return” is a fundamental, internationally-recognized human right afforded to ALL refugees everywhere.

*“UNRWA perpetuates the existence of Palestine refugees by failing to resettle them as UNHCR would”*

- All protracted refugee situations are the result of the failure to find solutions to their underlying political crises. UNRWA provides assistance to Palestine refugees. Other UN agencies including UNHCR provide assistance to other protracted refugee communities. While UNRWA does not have a resettlement mandate, third-country resettlement is available to less than ½ of 1% of the world’s refugee population.
- Even if available, the implementation of one of the durable solutions pursuant to UNHCR’s mandate will not only require the consent of individual refugees but, in the context of resettlement or integration, the consent of host states.

*“If UNRWA were eliminated, Palestine refugees would not exist”*

- Palestine refugees exist not because of UNRWA but because of the continuing lack of permanent political resolution of the conflict. The same applies to UNHCR, in that other protracted refugee communities (e.g. Somali, Afghan) would similarly continue to exist pending a permanent political resolution to their plights.
- Without UNRWA, Palestine refugees would entirely fall under the responsibilities and associated financial burden of the host states, or other authorities, as applicable, including Israel, Jordan and Lebanon.

*“UNRWA has kept Palestinian refugees in camps”*

- UNRWA does not keep Palestinian refugees in camps. The camps are not operated by or governed by UNRWA but rather the host country. Not all Palestinian refugees live in camps. In many countries, like Lebanon, they don’t have the right to buy property, but if they can afford to rent a property outside the camps, many do so.

*“UNRWA instills violence and hatred in its schools with anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic curriculum”*

- UNRWA uses the curriculum of the “host country” in its schools. This ensures Palestine refugees can integrate into host educational systems at any level, and more broadly participate in social and economic life of the hosts.

- Reviews commissioned by UNRWA's donors focused on the West Bank and Gaza, have found nothing to support allegations that UNRWA teaches hatred. UNRWA supplements host country curricula with its own human rights curriculum, which is integrated into its education system in all of its 700 schools, something unique in the region.
- UNHCR is not an alternative to UNRWA for providing education as it does not operate schools directly. Instead, UNHCR (in partnership with UNICEF) supports refugee children attendance in local host community schools or those run by NGOs in refugee camps, both of which by their very nature use "host country" curriculum.

*"UNRWA allows its schools to be used by terrorist groups to store weapons used against Israel"*

- In the course of the regular inspection of its premises in the Gaza Strip, UNRWA has in the past discovered weapons or Hamas infrastructure hidden in or beneath its schools in the Gaza Strip. As soon as weapons were discovered, UNRWA staff were withdrawn from the premises. The agency immediately informed the relevant parties and pursued all possible measures for the removal of the objects in order to preserve the safety and security of the school.
- UNRWA publicly, strongly and unequivocally condemned the group or groups responsible for this flagrant violation of the inviolability of its premises under international law, and has conducted a comprehensive investigation into the circumstances surrounding such incidents to help prevent them from occurring.
- UNRWA has reinforced and continues to implement its robust procedures to maintain the neutrality of all its premises, including a strict no-weapons policy and regular inspections of its installations, to ensure they are only used for humanitarian purposes.
- UNRWA, their staff and the children they educate are the victims of this outrageous abuse of their premises.