

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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June 11, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2202 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is continuing to investigate the Biden Administration's decision to restore U.S. funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in 2021. The Committee wrote to you on February 16, 2024, seeking documents and information related to our concerns.¹ On May 31, 2024, the State Department provided an inadequate response to that letter, and documents that do not fully address the Committee's concerns.² As such, we are reiterating our document requests along with an additional request that the State Department make Julieta Valls Noyes, Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration available for a transcribed interview.

As we wrote previously, the Committee is concerned by the Biden Administration's decision to renew funding for UNRWA. The underlying concerns have not changed. Reports emerged in February that several UNRWA staff participated in the October 7, 2023, terrorist attacks by Hamas.³ More recent reports show Hamas compounds located under UNRWA buildings in Gaza City.⁴ The previous administration suspended funding for the agency because it assessed that UNRWA was "irredeemably flawed."⁵ UNRWA has for years used its classrooms to promote violence, hate speech, jihad, martyrdom, and antisemitism.⁶ Rockets have been

¹ Letter from Hon. James Comer, Chairman, H. Comm. on Oversight & Accountability, to Hon. Antony Blinken, Secretary, Department of State (Feb. 16, 2024).

² Letter from Naz Durkoglu, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Legislative Affairs, Department of State, to Hon. James Comer, Chair, H. Comm. on Oversight & Accountability (May 31, 2024).

³ Carrie Kell-Lynn, David Luhnnow, *Intelligence Reveals Details of U.N. Agency Staff's Links to Oct. 7 Attack*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (Jan. 29, 2024).

⁴ Dov Lieber, David Luhnnow, *Hamas Military Compound Found Beneath U.N. Agency Headquarters in Gaza*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (Feb. 10, 2024).

⁵ *US announces it's cutting all funding to Palestinian refugee agency*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (Aug. 31, 2018).

⁶ IMPACT-se, *UNRWA Education: Reform or Regression* (March 14, 2023); IMPACT-se, *Review of UNRWA-Produced Study Materials in Palestinian Territories* (Jan. 2021); IMPACT-se, *The 2020-21 Palestinian School Curriculum Grades 1-12* (Sept. 2020).

found on multiple occasions in UNRWA schools.⁷ Following the October 7 terrorist attacks, there was widespread enthusiasm for the attacks by UNRWA teachers and staff.⁸

Many of these allegations and the pattern of extremism and antisemitism from UNRWA teachers and staff date back a decade. Yet, the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration signed a Framework for Cooperation with UNRWA in May 2023.⁹ The documents provided by the State Department on May 31, 2023, included the framework for cooperation with UNRWA, but do not provide any evidence that the State Department took steps to ensure accountability for use of funds sent to the organization. Importantly, the State Department still has not explained why it decided to renew funding to UNRWA. The list of safeguards and oversight mechanisms provided in your response only underscores the Committee's initial concerns. Given the Committee's previously raised concerns regarding the decision to renew cooperation with UNRWA, and the State Department's failure to comply with the request, we seek information directly from Ms. Valls Noyes.

Additionally, the Committee reiterates its previous requests for information from the State Department. For your convenience, below are the requests from the Committee's February 16 letter:

1. All documents and communications between or among any State Department official and the White House relating to the decision, announced April 7, 2021, to resume funding to UNRWA;
2. All documents and communications demonstrating what safeguards are in place to prevent U.S. aid designated for UNRWA from funding or providing material support for terrorists or terrorist organizations;
3. All documents and communications related to or discussing the diversion of UNRWA funds or resources by Hamas or any other foreign terrorist organization.

If the State Department is unable or unwilling to comply with these requests, the State Department should contact Committee staff no later than June 25, 2024, so the Committee is able to evaluate additional actions it may take to obtain the information it seeks. Attached are instructions for producing the documents and information to the Committee.

To schedule the interview or ask any follow-up questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority staff at (202) 225-5074. The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

⁷ Ilan Ben Zion, *Rockets found in UNRWA school for third time*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (Jul. 30, 2014).

⁸ Jeremy Sharon, *Several UNRWA staffers praised Hamas' October 7 massacres report finds*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (Nov. 6, 2023); Press Release, UN Watch, *Group of 3,000 UNRWA teachers celebrates Hamas massacre and rape* (Jan. 10, 2024).

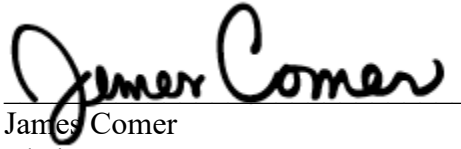
⁹ Release, U.S. Dep't of State, *2023-2024 U.S.-UNRWA Framework for Cooperation* (Jun. 1, 2023).

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken

June 11, 2024

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "J" and "C".

James Comer

Chairman

Committee on Oversight and Accountability

cc: The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability