The Committee on the Rights of the Child

Statement on the Knesset´s legislative ban on UNRWA

The Committee on the Rights of the Child condemns in the strongest terms the Israeli Knesset´s legislative decision to ban the activities of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) in Palestine, including Gaza. If implemented, this ban will have catastrophic humanitarian impact on children and families who have survived Israel´s restless military attacks for over a year now.

Following the review of Israel´s implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child September 2024, the Committee urged Israel to "cooperate with, and support the work of, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in providing education and health services to Palestinian children and ensure the safety of the Agency's operations throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in East Jerusalem". This recommendation is based on the fact that UNRWA is mandated by the General Assembly to provide Palestine refugees, including children, with basic services such as education, health care and social support as well as emergency and humanitarian assistance and protection pending the just resolution of the question of Palestine refugees.

Before 7 October UNRWA was providing over 300,000 children with education in the Gaza Strip and is currently providing education to around 47,000 children in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. If the Knesset legislation will be implemented the UNRWA operation in Gaza would collapse and likely also the entire UN humanitarian operation as it relies on UNRWA's platform at all levels. The same applies to UNRWA operations in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Furthermore, their implementation would most likely deny an entire generation of children in Gaza of their right to education, considering that UNRWA is the only entity that can re-start the education of the over 650,000 children in Gaza once the war ends.

Furthermore, the disruption of the UNRWA operations, in the context of the forced evacuations of hospitals and attacks on primary health services, has already led to devastating consequences affecting children patients in urgent need of vital assistance, including trauma care and support. It is crucial that a safe humanitarian corridor be opened to ensure that qualified medical professionals, medical supplies, and medicines, are made available as soon as possible.

Should the state of Israel carry out the legislative decision of the Knesset, the Committee on the Rights of the Child will consider it a grave violation of the obligations Israel has undertaken in accordance with the Convention of the Rights of the Child as well as other international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Moreover, it would clearly violate the ruling of the International Court of Justice ordering Israel to guarantee the delivery of sufficient humanitarian aid and to facilitate access to essential services.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child urgently calls on Israel to immediately lift all restrictions on UNRWA's mandate and to provide it with all the support that its role and the urgent needs of the population, particularly children, require. We also call on other States to support UNRWA in any way possible with the aim of ensuring its full operationalization in accordance with its mandate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

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