

Human Rights Watch:

ICJ Advisory Opinion: Israel Is Legally Obligated to Enable UNRWA to Operate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory**29 July 2026 – Statement of Facts**

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■ Governments should disregard the statement issued by the Board of Peace, chaired by U.S. President Donald Trump, claiming that “UNRWA has no place in the new Gaza.” This statement represents the latest step in the long-running campaign by the United States and Israeli governments to dismantle the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

■ Even before October 2023, UNRWA was providing life-saving humanitarian assistance and essential services to Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, and elsewhere. In its 2025 Advisory Opinion, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) made clear that Israel is legally obligated to enable UNRWA to operate, ensuring that humanitarian relief reaches civilians in Gaza without obstruction.

■ UNRWA remains the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza. Humanitarian organizations operating in the territory have repeatedly emphasized that UNRWA is irreplaceable and that undermining its work would create a serious, and potentially catastrophic, humanitarian vacuum.

■ UNRWA provides food assistance and medical aid to Gaza’s population, while also delivering education to hundreds of thousands of children who have been largely deprived of their right to education for more than two years. The Agency further provides psycho-social support to approximately 730,000 displaced people and supplies drinking water to around 860,000 people every day. The deliberate obstruction of such humanitarian assistance by states constitutes a violation of international law.

■ UNRWA has continued delivering these vital services despite the killing of nearly 400 of its staff members in Gaza since October 2023, the damage or destruction of many of its facilities, and the suspension of funding that has pushed the Agency to the brink of collapse.

■ The Board of Peace has no authority to determine whether UNRWA should have a role in Gaza. The Agency’s mandate can only be amended or terminated by the United Nations General Assembly, which voted by an overwhelming majority in December 2025 to renew UNRWA’s mandate. Human Rights Watch has previously warned of the risk that the Board of Peace could undermine the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

■ The Israeli authorities should comply with their obligations under international law and end their ongoing attacks on UNRWA and other humanitarian organizations. States should continue to fund, support, and protect UNRWA and its mandate.

■ Rather than attempting to discredit UNRWA, the United States and the Board of Peace would be better advised to press Israel to comply with its obligations under international law and to end its obstruction of humanitarian aid entering Gaza, which remains far below the level required to meet the population’s needs.

End.