

Roland Friedrich, Director of UNRWA Affairs in the West Bank:

“We Remain the Largest Humanitarian Actor on the Ground in Both the West Bank and Gaza”

27 August 2026 – Report

- The Qalandiya Vocational Training Centre in occupied East Jerusalem was the last operational UNRWA facility there, after Israeli authorities had shut down other UNRWA facilities, including schools and clinics serving Palestine refugees.
- On Tuesday, 24 August 2026, Israeli authorities forcibly entered the centre and unlawfully seized it.
- The United Nations, led by the Secretary-General, condemned the action in the strongest terms. The UN stated that the entry of armed security forces into a United Nations facility without the organization’s authorization or consent was unacceptable. It called on the Government of Israel to immediately cease its interference with UNRWA facilities, vacate them, and return all affected premises to the United Nations without delay.
- These actions come in the context of Israeli anti-UNRWA legislation, adopted approximately a year and a half ago.
- The closure of the centre deprives hundreds of Palestinian young people of educational opportunities and of their future. Friedrich expressed hope that UN Member States would assume their responsibility by exerting pressure so that UNRWA could resume its work at the centre.
- “This Is an Unacceptable Violation of the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations”
- At present, Israeli security forces remain inside the centre alongside Israeli officials from the Jerusalem municipality, carrying out work and alterations to the facility.
- Friedrich said this is an unacceptable violation, as the Secretary-General has emphasized, of the privileges and immunities of the United Nations.
- He added that it is an extremely serious development because, if the situation continues, 340 young people from the West Bank will be deprived of their right to education.
- “What we are seeing now is an attempt to seize the Qalandiya Training Centre. As we all know, United Nations facilities around the world enjoy privileges and immunities under international law, particularly under the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.”

Israeli Anti-UNRWA Legislation

Friedrich said the Secretary-General had been very clear in calling for the situation to be restored as quickly as possible.

He explained that the background to Tuesday’s events lies in the Israeli anti-UNRWA legislation adopted roughly a year and a half ago, and that the seizure must be understood within the broader context of efforts by the current Israeli government to bring UNRWA’s activities in occupied East Jerusalem to an end.

Since January 2025, Friedrich and his international UNRWA colleagues have been un-

able to work from their duty station because visas have not been issued to them.

UNRWA's Six Schools in Jerusalem Have Been Closed

Friedrich said UNRWA had witnessed the gradual closure of its six schools in occupied East Jerusalem, depriving 800 children of education.

Water and Electricity Cut-Off Provisions for UNRWA Facilities in East Jerusalem

In December, amendments were introduced to the anti-UNRWA laws, including a provision allowing water and electricity to be cut off from UNRWA facilities in East Jerusalem.

Seizure of UNRWA's Sheikh Jarrah Compound

Israeli security forces were permitted to seize UNRWA premises, including its main headquarters compound in Sheikh Jarrah and the Qalandiya Training Centre.

The Sheikh Jarrah compound was seized and partially demolished in January.

Two UNRWA Clinics Serving 40,000 Refugees Were Closed

At the same time, UNRWA also witnessed the closure of its two clinics in East Jerusalem, which had served approximately 40,000 Palestine refugees living in occupied East Jerusalem.

Unlawful Seizure of the Qalandiya Training Centre

Friedrich described the centre as a unique facility.

It is UNRWA's only training centre specifically dedicated to providing vocational training for young people from refugee camps in the West Bank.

These young people had benefited from free education that gave them hope and a perspective for the future.

"What we saw yesterday is not only a clear violation of international law, but it is also outrageous because it literally deprives the beneficiaries who depend on UNRWA of their future."

UN Premises Are Inviolable

Friedrich stressed that every UN Member State, pursuant to its obligations under the Charter and as a party to the General Convention, is required to respect the privileges and immunities of the United Nations.

This includes, for example:

the inviolability of UN premises;

- respect for immunities relating to UN staff;
- respect for UN vehicles;
- and the same protections that apply wherever the United Nations operates around the world.
- Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice

Friedrich said the International Court of Justice made clear in its advisory opinion last October that Israel is obligated to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territory through the United Nations generally, and through UNRWA in particular.

“We remain the largest humanitarian actor on the ground in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.”

He added that Israel also has an obligation to protect United Nations personnel, including UNRWA staff as personnel of a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly.

What happened on Tuesday, and what continues to happen, is, he said, the exact opposite.

Friedrich warned that this sets a dangerous precedent regarding the ability of UN staff to operate safely and be protected in other high-risk contexts around the world.

He stressed that this issue is not only about UNRWA or its facilities in occupied East Jerusalem, but also about Member States’ respect for the privileges and immunities of the United Nations and for the multilateral system as a whole.

“There Was a Very Strong Political Signal”

Before the unlawful seizure of the centre, on Monday, a delegation of diplomats and representatives of UN Member States visited the facility and were able to observe the training programmes and workshops provided there.

Friedrich said this represented a very strong political signal.

“What we hope is that Member States will assume their responsibility to exert pressure so that we can resume our work at the training centre.”

“The Key Thing Is That We Are Able to Return to the Centre and Operate It”

Friedrich noted that the Secretary-General had issued a very clear statement the previous day and that many Member States had also issued supportive statements.

However, he stressed that statements alone are not enough.

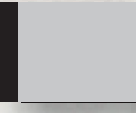
“The key thing is that we are able to return to this centre, operate it, and serve the people whom the General Assembly has mandated us to serve.”

The Ban on UNRWA Operations and Presence, and the “No-Contact” Policy

Friedrich explained that there are two laws.

The first bans UNRWA’s operations and presence in what Israel considers territory under its sovereignty. This applies to UNRWA’s services in occupied East Jerusalem.

The United Nations does not recognize Israel’s annexation of East Jerusalem.



Since these laws entered into force in January 2025, UNRWA has continued to do everything possible to maintain its services in occupied East Jerusalem.

However, over the past year and a half, the space available to the United Nations generally, and UNRWA in particular, in East Jerusalem has been dramatically reduced.

Until Tuesday, only one UNRWA facility remained there: the Qalandiya Training Centre.

The second law establishes a “no-contact” policy, prohibiting Israeli authorities from communicating with UNRWA.

This policy affects UNRWA operations in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

More Than 11,000 Staff Working Every Day

Despite these restrictions, UNRWA remains able to operate in Gaza and the West Bank.

In Gaza, the Agency continues to provide vital humanitarian assistance through more than 11,000 staff members working every day.

70,000 Children in Emergency Education Programmes

In the field of education, UNRWA currently has 70,000 children enrolled in emergency education programmes.

60,000 Health Consultations Every Day in Gaza

UNRWA provides approximately 60,000 health consultations every day in the Gaza Strip.

It also provides half of Gaza’s drinking water and continues to operate more than 70 shelters.

Humanitarian Operations in Gaza Continue

Humanitarian operations in the Gaza Strip are continuing, but under increasingly difficult conditions.

Friedrich said UNRWA is no longer able to bring in its own supplies in the way it did before the Israeli no-contact policy entered into force.

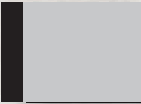
UNRWA Operations in the West Bank

UNRWA also continues to operate in the West Bank, where it has approximately 4,600 staff on the ground.

The Agency continues to provide education and currently operates 90 schools, following the closure of its six schools in East Jerusalem.

Nearly 50,000 children are expected to begin the new school year the following week.

During the previous year, UNRWA provided approximately 1.1 million health consultations through 50 health facilities.



Together with its partners, the Agency also provided:

- social protection;
- cash assistance;
- in-kind food support;

to more than 270,000 beneficiaries during the previous year.

Civil-Military Coordination Has Become More Difficult

Friedrich said operations in the West Bank are continuing, but under increasingly difficult conditions.

Civil-military coordination is one area in which UNRWA can no longer operate effectively because of the Israeli no-contact policy, although the Agency remains able to continue its work.

“I Have the Highest Respect for My UNRWA Colleagues on the Ground”

Friedrich paid tribute to UNRWA staff on the ground:

“I have the highest respect for my UNRWA colleagues on the ground — Palestinian teachers, nurses and social workers in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank — who work under extremely difficult conditions every day.”

“What We Need Is the Restoration of Respect”

Friedrich said:

“What we need is the restoration of respect by all Member States for the United Nations in general, and for UNRWA as an agency mandated by the General Assembly.”

Humanitarian Space in the West Bank Is Shrinking

Friedrich warned that humanitarian space in the West Bank is increasingly being restricted.

“We need to reverse the trend of shrinking humanitarian space.”

He said many restrictions had been imposed over the previous 18 months.

Some directly affect UNRWA, but the problem goes beyond the Agency.

“Humanitarian space in the West Bank as a whole is shrinking. This is the trend that needs to be reversed.”

More Than 34,000 People Remain Displaced

Friedrich said it is also necessary to reverse the trend of displacement and forced displacement in the West Bank, which affects UNRWA beneficiaries in particular.

Three refugee camps in the northern West Bank have been emptied of their residents, who were forcibly displaced.

“More than 34,000 people remain displaced to this day. We remain on the ground to support them.”

“Dangerous Trends Are Creating Facts on the Ground”

Friedrich warned that these are dangerous trends because, together with settlement expansion and the construction of road networks, they are creating facts on the ground that make the two-State solution less viable than ever before.

He said there is an urgent need to return to a political process and reverse the dangerous developments on the ground.

The objective, he said, should be a credible political path that allows for a just and equitable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with Security Council resolutions, while also allowing UNRWA to continue its operations.

“We Are Mandated to Do Our Work Because There Is No Political Solution to the Conflict”

Friedrich said some of the challenges UNRWA faces amid the intense political rhetoric directed against it are linked to the fact that the issue of Palestine refugees is deeply emotional for both sides of the conflict.

“We are mandated to do our work because there is no political solution to the conflict.”

“We Need to Move Away from the Brink We Are Seeing in the West Bank”

Friedrich concluded:

“It is extremely important to move away from the brink we are seeing in the West Bank now and return to a credible path towards a two-State solution and Palestinian self-determination.”

He said the ultimate objective should be to reach a situation in which UNRWA no longer needs to perform its current role because the conflict itself is moving towards resolution.

The End