

Australians understand the importance of giving generously to help people in crisis. Australian aid can help alleviate the devastating effects of Israel's decades-long military occupation in Palestine.

Israel's occupation of Palestine has created a humanitarian crisis. Palestinians endure ongoing threats to the health and safety of themselves, their children and their communities. This crisis is at catastrophic levels in the Gaza Strip, which has been under Israeli & Egyptian blockade since 2007 and has endured three major Israeli military operations since 2008.

Australian aid cannot resolve the political causes of the humanitarian crisis in Palestine. But aid can help alleviate the effects of that crisis on the most vulnerable and support the capacity of Palestinians to decide their own lives and futures.

Australian aid to Palestine is vital—for both humanitarian and strategic reasons

AUSTRALIAN AID TO PALESTINE—UNDERMINED AND CUT

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) estimates the Australian Government's aid to Palestine for the financial year 2018-2019 to be \$42.6 million. In the 2020-2021 budget, Australia's aid to Palestine was slashed down to \$29.8 million.



Australian parliamentarians visiting agricultural industries funded by Australian aid and delivered by Oxfam Australia in the West Bank.

Bilateral funding— AXED

Australia provides bilateral funding to many Governments directly. Australia has provided funding to the Palestinian Authority through the World Bank and had planned for this to be ongoing. Israel often withholds taxation payments due to Palestine, in breach of the Oslo Accords. International funding therefore provides vital stable income for the Palestinian Authority.

However in July 2018, following a US decision to suspend aid funding, the Australian Government also ceased funding to the Palestinian Authority. There was no evidence by any agency, including the World Bank that the Palestinian Authority had misused any funds.

UNRWA—basic services to Palestinian refugees

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) was established in 1949 to provide basic services to Palestinian refugees until they could return to their homes. UNRWA provides schools and medical clinics, as well as food distribution to the 5.6 million Palestinian refugees registered with them—most who are stateless, and many who live in poverty in neighbouring countries or in refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza.

Like many other UN Member States, Australia provides funding to Palestinians through its voluntary contributions to UNRWA. The Australian Government committed \$80 million to UNRWA over four years under a Strategic Partnership Framework (2016-2020). Australia also has contributed to UNRWA's periodic calls for emergency funding.

Partisan groups opposed to Palestinian refugee rights have tried to undermine Australia's support of UNRWA by spreading misinformation and making false claims about the use of these funds.

Historically, the US has provided about 30% of UNRWA's funding. However in 2018, after indicating they do not support the overall mandate of UNRWA, the Trump administration completely withdrew its funding, having a devastating effect on UNRWA's basic services.

In the 2020-2021 budget, Australia cut its funding to UNRWA in half: from \$20m to \$10m per annum.

Funding through Australian Aid Agencies

DFAT accredited aid agencies can propose small projects and receive matched funds from DFAT through the Australian NGO Partnership (ANCP).

Major projects are undertaken in line with Australian Government funding priorities—through the Australian Middle East NGO Cooperation Agreement (AMENCA). AMENCA has been running since 2005 and is now in its third phase (AMENCA 3). Four accredited Australian aid agencies are contracted to deliver AMENCA 3 from 2015-2021: CARE, Oxfam, Union Aid Abroad — APHEDA, and World Vision.

Attacks on NGOs delivering AMENCA:

In August 2016, a World Vision staff member was arrested by the Israeli Government and accused of giving \$50 million to Hamas. Both World Vision and Department of Foreign Affairs investigations found no credible evidence to support the charges. The World Vision component of the AMENCA program was suspended following the arrest and was not reinstated, pending the outcome of the ongoing trial. More than four years later the staff member remains in an Israeli prison whilst the trial is ongoing – he has pleaded not guilty to all charges

In 2018, The *Daily Telegraph* alleged on its front page that Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA had links by association to the Popular Front Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). DFAT suspended the APHEDA component of the AMENCA program and ran an audit. The audit found no wrongdoing and the program was reinstated.

Dealing with these allegations involves a huge commitment of time, money and effort on the part of Australian aid agencies and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Attacks to undermine the legitimacy of aid to Palestine are not unique to Australia, but have their basis in partisan organisations that seek to undermine organisations supporting Palestinian human rights.

“Australia Awards” scholarships program

Since 2012, as part of a broader program, 74 scholarships have been offered for Palestinians to study post-graduate degrees in Australia, and a significant focus is on those employed by the Palestinian Authority. The scholarships cover a return airfare, the tuition fees, and some living allowances.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

Australia has maintained \$10 million per/annum to UN OHCA in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in the previous few years. The Humanitarian Fund facilitates health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and shelter support. More than 75% of funding is being spent in Gaza where the humanitarian situation is dire.



In 2014, Israel bombed UNRWA schools being used as refuges, killing 44 civilians and injuring 227 people.

Humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Palestinians is essential but it is no substitute for permanent political resolution

Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA): 50 years of occupation

AUSTRALIAN AID TO PALESTINE SHOULD

- Acknowledge that the humanitarian crisis in Palestine is caused by the decades-long Israeli military occupation; and push for an end to Israeli military control and occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza;
- Substantially increase our aid to Palestine, to demonstrate our practical and genuine commitment to the Palestinian people and the severe humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian territories;
- Increase its financial commitment to UNRWA by at least \$30 million and contribute generously to UNRWA's periodic calls for emergency funding;
- Develop a mechanism that efficiently and rapidly deals with allegations against aid agencies working in Palestine that does not penalise the agencies or deprive the intended aid recipients.