

Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission



Attention:
Josep Borrell Fontelles
High Representative / Vice-President

Brussels, 4 October 2024

Dear President von der Leyen,

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, are writing to express our grave concern regarding the potential misuse of European Union funds in connection with terrorist activities.

Recent reports from reputable sources, including Sky News and ABC News, have revealed that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) employed an individual identified by Israel as the leader of Hamas in Lebanon.

This revelation became known following the death of Fateh Sharif, the Hamas commander in Lebanon, in an Israeli airstrike on 29th September 2024. Although Sharif had been suspended from UNRWA since March 2024, after allegations of his ties to Hamas surfaced, it is deeply troubling that an EU-supported organization could have employed someone connected to such a violent group in the first place.

This is not an isolated incident. Last year, Israel accused more than a dozen UNRWA employees in Gaza of involvement in the atrocities committed on 7th October 2023. These cases raise serious concerns about UNRWA's ability — or willingness — to effectively screen and remove individuals affiliated with terrorist organizations like Hamas. Combined with longstanding criticisms of UNRWA's operations and relationships in Gaza, this issue demands urgent attention.

The European Commission allocated €16 million in additional funding for UNRWA in 2024, contributing to a total of €82 million to support essential services such as health and education for Palestinian refugees. However, in light of recent revelations, we believe this funding must be reconsidered. It is unacceptable for EU funds to be indirectly supporting terrorism or individuals linked to terrorist groups.

We propose a more secure and responsible alternative: redirecting this funding to the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) or another EU body, which could provide much-needed relief and support to Palestinian refugees under the strict oversight of EU institutions. Such a move would mitigate the risk of infiltration by hostile actors and ensure humanitarian aid reaches those in genuine need, free from the influence of terrorist organizations.

The European Union cannot afford to tolerate the misuse of its funds, especially when they are intended for humanitarian purposes. Failure to address the infiltration of terrorist elements into UN agencies risks undermining the very principles upon which these institutions were founded.

We therefore urge the European Commission to investigate immediately the allocation and use of EU funds by UNRWA and to reassess its continued financial support for organizations that may be complicit in terrorism.

We look forward to your prompt and decisive response to this urgent matter.

Yours sincerely,

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Hildegard Bentele, EPP
Miriam Lexmann, EPP
Antonio López-Istúriz White, EPP
Lukas Mandl, EPP
Alice Teodorescu Măwe, EPP
Niclas Herbst, EPP
Petras Austrevicius, Renew
Nikola Bartůšek, PfiE
Isabel Benjumea, EPP
Rachel Blom, PfiE
Jaroslav Bžoch, PfiE
Laurent Castillo, EPP
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Ton Diepeveen, PfiE
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Marieke Ehlers, PfiE
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Christophe Gomart, EPP
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Svenja Hahn, Renew
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