UNRWA confirms terrorist killed by IDF who led Re’im shelter massacre was a staffer

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UNRWA on Thursday confirmed that one of its staffers was killed by an Israeli strike in Gaza a day earlier, after Israel named him as a Hamas Nukbha force commander.

The IDF and Shin Bet said that Muhammad Abu Attawi, who led the killing and kidnapping of Israelis from a roadside bomb shelter near Kibbutz Re’im on October 7 last year, had been employed by UNRWA since July 2022 while serving as a Nukbha commander in Hamas’s Bureij Battalion.

According to UNRWA, Attawi’s name was included in a letter the Palestinian refugee agency received from Israel in July that included a list of 100 staff members who were also allegedly members of terror groups, including Hamas.

But the agency said it did not take any action against Attawi — who worked as a driver — because Israel did not respond to a request for further information.

“The UNRWA commissioner general responded to that letter immediately stating that any allegation is taken seriously. He urged (the government of Israel) to cooperate with the agency by providing more information so he could take action. To date, UNRWA has not received any response to that letter,” said Juliette Touma, UNRWA’s director of communications.

During the October 7 onslaught that started the ongoing war in Gaza, Attawi commanded the attack on a bomb shelter near Re’im where partygoers from the Nova festival had fled.

The shelter was one of several that became infamous in the aftermath of the attack, having become deathtraps for many Israelis who huddled there amid the onslaught.

Nearly 30 were in the Re’im shelter when Hamas terrorists stormed it, hurling in grenades and firing on those inside. Sixteen were murdered, four were kidnapped — including Hersh Goldberg-Polin, who was executed many months later in Gaza — and seven survived.

Attawi was also involved in attacks on troops during the war in Gaza, the IDF said.

“Israel has requested urgent clarifications from senior UN officials and an urgent investigation into the involvement of UNRWA employees in the October 7 massacre,” IDF Spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said Thursday.

Israel has long accused the agency of employing members of Hamas and other terror groups, allowing them to steep future generations in virulent anti-Israel ideology.

While UNRWA provides education, health, and aid to millions of Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, Israel has also accused multiple agency staffers of taking part in the Hamas-led attack on October 7, in which some 1,200 people in Israel were killed and 251 taken hostage.

Several donor countries cut aid to the agency after Israel provided evidence that employees took part in Hamas’s October 7 massacre. Many, however, have since reinstated their support, citing the dire need in Gaza.

During its operations in Gaza, the IDF found a Hamas data center located directly beneath UNRWA headquarters in Gaza City, in addition to numerous findings indicating the use of the agency’s assets for terror purposes.

The UN acknowledged in August that nine UNRWA staff may have been involved in the Hamas October attacks and fired them.

UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) was established in 1949 and provides relief to Palestinians considered refugees across the Middle East, including in Lebanon where it says up to 250,000 reside.

The only UN refugee agency established for a specific people, it has come under criticism for bestowing the status not just on those who lost their homes in 1948, but to all their descendants as well — a practice unheard of elsewhere. Israel and its supporters say this encourages an enduring victimhood mentality and narrative in Palestinians and increases their dependence on aid.