UNRWA condemns subterranean opening found beneath Gaza school

December 1, 2022

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The Times of Israel

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/unrwa-condemns-subterranean-opening-found-beneath-gaza-school/>

The UN agency for Palestinians said on Wednesday that it had discovered a “man-made cavity” underneath a school in Gaza, calling the excavation a breach of law and a threat to children and staff.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency, known as UNRWA, said in a statement that it had “recently identified a man-made cavity underneath the grounds of an UNRWA school in Gaza.”

“The agency protested strongly to the relevant authorities in Gaza to express outrage and condemnation of the presence of such a structure underneath one of its installations,” the statement said.

The excavation “is a serious violation of the agency’s neutrality and a breach of international law. Moreover, it exposes children and agency staff to significant security and safety risks,” [UNRWA said](https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/unrwa-strongly-condemns-neutrality-breach-against-agency-gaza).

The agency said it had immediately cordoned off the area and permanently sealed the cavity.

It wasn’t clear whether the excavation was a tunnel linked to other underground passages or if there were weapons stored inside. UNRWA did not respond to a request for further information.

The Gaza-ruling Hamas terrorist regime has dug an extensive network of tunnels under Gaza, which are used to move its forces or store weapons, including rockets and launchers.

Israel has long charged Hamas with hiding weapons and infrastructure in tunnels around schools, hospitals and residential buildings, and tunnels and weapons have been found at UNRWA schools in the past.

During fighting in 2021 between Israel and Gaza terrorists, [a tunnel](https://www.timesofisrael.com/unrwa-tunnels-under-gaza-school-hit-by-israel-in-last-months-conflict/) was found underneath an UNRWA school. The IDF also determined that the courtyard of at least one Gaza school — it was not clear if it belonged to UNRWA — housed 14 underground rocket launchpads, which it said were used during the fighting.

[Hamas prevented](https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-said-to-block-un-team-from-inspecting-school-where-tunnel-was-found/) UN bomb disposal experts from inspecting the UNRWA school under which the tunnel was found last year.

In 2020, UNRWA [found a hand grenade](https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-agency-finds-hand-grenade-in-gaza-school/) and military vest in one of its Gaza schools.

In 2017, the agency said it had [found a Hamas tunnel](https://www.timesofisrael.com/unrwa-uncovers-hamas-dug-tunnel-under-school-in-gaza/) dug underneath one of its schools.

During Operation Protective Edge in 2014, rockets were found in UNRWA schools [on several occasions](https://www.timesofisrael.com/rockets-found-in-unrwa-school-for-third-time/). In one of those cases, a spokesperson said the organization had delivered the rockets to “local authorities.” Israeli officials charged that the weaponry was returned to Hamas.

As schools in Gaza have regularly been used as refugee centers during times of conflict, the IDF’s official policy is to avoid striking them unless necessary.

UNRWA provides social services, education and health care to millions of Palestinians and is a major employer in the territories.

Israel has long pushed for UNRWA’s closure, arguing that it helps perpetuate the conflict with the Palestinians since it confers refugee status upon descendants of those originally displaced around the time of Israel’s War of Independence, unlike other refugee groups around the world.

The agency has also been found to [employ antisemitic staffers](https://www.timesofisrael.com/unrwa-places-6-staffers-on-leave-for-incitement-in-social-media-posts/) and [use textbooks](https://www.timesofisrael.com/eu-parliament-moves-to-condition-funds-for-unrwa-for-alleged-textbook-incitement/) deemed antisemitic and inciteful.

Wednesday’s announcement came as the UN General Assembly passed a series of resolutions in support of Palestinians [at an event](https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-envoy-tells-un-were-at-the-end-of-the-road-for-2-state-solution/) marking 75 years since the UN partition plan. The resolutions were condemned by Israel as “absurd.”

[A day earlier, the UN marked](https://www.timesofisrael.com/the-occupation-must-end-un-leader-tells-palestinian-solidarity-event/) the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at its headquarters in New York.

President of the UN General Assembly Csaba Kőrösi called for increased support for UNRWA at the event, saying the agency was short $600 million in funding.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the event called for an end to Gaza border closures and support for UNRWA.