Risch Leads Effort to Cut U.S. Funds to Anti-Semitic UNRWA

February 15, 2023

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

<https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/rep/release/risch-leads-effort-to-cut-us-funds-to-anti-semitic-unrwa>

U.S. Senator Jim Risch (R-Idaho), ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, today led 13 colleagues in reintroducing the [*United Nations Relief and Works Agency Accountability and Transparency Act*](http://mta.hilltopcms.com/?r=MTAwOA0KSjQ5MjUyLTUzREQ2MjNELUNBRTEtNDk5NS05MTM0LTk0RjY0OERGRTVGMg0KDQpmNTAwMDAwMDg2Njk5Mw0KaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZm9yZWlnbi5zZW5hdGUuZ292L2ltby9tZWRpYS9kb2MvMDItMTUtMjNfdW5yd2FfYWNjb3VudGFiaWxpdHlfYmlsbC5wZGYNCnRydWUNCndoaXRuZXlfZm9sbHVvQGZvcmVpZ24uc2VuYXRlLmdvdg%3d%3d). This legislation outlines a comprehensive approach to cease U.S. contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), a successor entity, or to the U.N. regular budget for the support of UNRWA unless the Secretary of State certifies every 180 days to Congress that UNRWA meets strict accountability and transparency criteria.

Joining Risch in reintroducing this legislation were Senators Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Bill Cassidy (R-La.), Rick Scott (R-Fla.), Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.), Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Tim Scott (R-S.C.), John Thune (R-S.D.), Mike Lee (R-Utah), Bill Hagerty (R-Tenn.), Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), Ted Budd (R-N.C.), and John Cornyn (R-Texas). U.S. Representative Chip Roy (R-Texas) will be introducing companion legislation in the House of Representatives later this week.

“UNRWA has a long history of employing people connected to terrorist movements like Hamas, promoting anti-Semitic textbooks, and using its schools to store Hamas weapons. It is unthinkable that U.S. taxpayer dollars would be used to help fund such an organization,” **said Risch**. “This legislation will cease U.S. contributions to UNRWA unless the administration certifies that the agency is not affiliated with U.S. designated foreign terrorist organizations and does not support anti-Semitic rhetoric. My colleagues and I will continue working to hold the administration and UNRWA accountable until consequential reforms are made.”

Text of the bill can be found [here](http://mta.hilltopcms.com/?r=MTAwOA0KSjQ5MjUyLTUzREQ2MjNELUNBRTEtNDk5NS05MTM0LTk0RjY0OERGRTVGMg0KDQpmNTAwMDAwMDg2Njk5Mw0KaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZm9yZWlnbi5zZW5hdGUuZ292L2ltby9tZWRpYS9kb2MvMDItMTUtMjNfdW5yd2FfYWNjb3VudGFiaWxpdHlfYmlsbC5wZGYNCnRydWUNCndoaXRuZXlfZm9sbHVvQGZvcmVpZ24uc2VuYXRlLmdvdg%3d%3d).

**Background:**

* UNRWA has a history of employing individuals affiliated with Hamas, an Iranian-backed, U.S. designated terrorist organization. Additionally, UNRWA schools have been used to store Hamas weapons and promote anti-Semitic education in their textbooks.
* The Trump Administration stopped funding UNRWA in 2018. The Biden Administration restarted funding and has thus far provided more than $682 million to UNRWA without securing any reforms.
* In April 2022, Senator Risch led 20 colleagues in sending a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken urging the administration to cease assistance to UNRWA until critical reforms are secured.
* In May 2022, Senator Risch questioned the nominee for assistant secretary of State for international organization affairs at a full committee hearing where he outlined his specific concerns regarding the administration’s decision to resume funding to UNRWA.
* In July 2022, Senator Risch [led 12 colleagues](http://mta.hilltopcms.com/?r=MTAwOA0KSjQ5MjUyLTUzREQ2MjNELUNBRTEtNDk5NS05MTM0LTk0RjY0OERGRTVGMg0KDQpmNTAwMDAwMDg2Njk5Mw0KaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZm9yZWlnbi5zZW5hdGUuZ292L3ByZXNzL3JlcC9yZWxlYXNlL3Jpc2NoLWxlYWRzLTEyLWNvbGxlYWd1ZXMtaW4taW50cm9kdWNpbmctdW5yd2EtYWNjb3VudGFiaWxpdHktYW5kLXRyYW5zcGFyZW5jeS1hY3QNCnRydWUNCndoaXRuZXlfZm9sbHVvQGZvcmVpZ24uc2VuYXRlLmdvdg%3d%3d) in introducing the *United Nations Relief and Works Agency Accountability and Transparency Act*.