UN Suspends Gaza Staffer Israel Claims Was Elected to Hamas' Leadership

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The UN agency for Palestinian refugees suspended a Palestinian staffer Sunday, a spokesman for the agency said as Israel alleged the employee was elected to a leadership position with the Islamist group Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Chris Gunness of UNRWA said Suhail al-Hindi, the chairman of the UNRWA Palestinian workers' union in Gaza and the principal of a UNRWA elementary school, was suspended due to "substantial information" received by the agency.

The Israeli defense body COGAT said al-Hindi was elected to Hamas' politburo in a secret vote this month, though al-Hindi denied that. The UN agency forbids its staff from holding political office and Gunness reportedly said earlier that al-Hindi has denied that he was elected as a Hamas official.

Maj. Gen. Yoav Mordechai, head of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), said on Sunday the UN must fire one al-Hindi.

"UNRWA must fire its employee, Suhail al-Hindi, who was elected to Hamas' administration," said Mordechai.

The general also said demanded the UN agency investigate the matter. The agency temporarily suspended al-Hindi in 2011 for participating in events with Hamas officials.