Top UN Staffer in Gaza Said Elected to Hamas Leadership

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<http://www.timesofisrael.com/top-un-staffer-in-gaza-said-elected-to-hamas-leadership/>

A senior Palestinian employee of a Gaza-based United Nations humanitarian agency was reportedly elected to Hamas’s political bureau, the top governing body of the terrorist organization the rules the Strip.

One the 15 members elected to the bureau in February’s internal elections was Muhammad al-Jamassi, a senior engineer employed by UNRWA, the UN agency in charge of Palestinian refugees, according to the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center.

Jamassi has held various positions within Hamas since 2007, including in the group’s public relations department and its affiliated charities, the center said.

He currently serves as board chairman for the UNRWA engineering department in central Gaza, and oversees all off the agency’s infrastructure projects in the area.

The February 13 vote saw another UNRWA staffer [elected to a top leadership position](http://www.timesofisrael.com/un-agency-suspends-staffer-accused-of-senior-hamas-role/) in Hamas.

Suhail al-Hindi, a teacher heading the agency’s employee union in Gaza, was suspended by UNRWA after Israel demanded his immediate termination.

The claims against al-Hindi were made by COGAT, the Israeli Defense Ministry agency responsible for civilian affairs in the West Bank and Gaza, and the Foreign Ministry.

UNRWA initially denied Hindi’s Hamas affiliation, saying in a statement that the agency had “neither uncovered nor received evidence to contradict the staff member’s denial that he was elected to political office.” Its statement quoted Hindi as saying that he has “no relation whatsoever with the issue.”

Three days later, however, UNRWA spokesman Chris Gunness announced Hindi was suspended based on “substantial information” it had been provided.

He insisted the decision to suspend Hindi pending the outcome of an internal investigation was made independently of Israeli demands.

Israel has long claimed that some of UNRWA’s Palestinian employees support terrorist activities and spread anti-Semitism online.

Last month, a UN watchdog group released a report showing screenshots from the Facebook pages of 40 UNRWA school employees in Gaza and other parts of the Mideast that it said “incite to Jihadist terrorism and anti-Semitism, including by posting Holocaust-denying videos and pictures celebrating Hitler.”

UN Watch said it had petitioned UN chief António Guterres, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and US envoy to the UN Nikki Haley, urging them “to take action and demand UN and UNRWA condemnation of the incitement, and the immediate termination of the implicated employees.”

In 2015, the US gave UNRWA — which provides Palestinian refugees and their descendants with education, health care, and social services — $380 million in funding.

Gunness recently told The Times of Israel that UNRWA was aware of the incitement allegations, and was “looking into [them] as part of our ongoing commitment to maintaining the Agency’s neutrality.”

In the coming months, Gunness said UNRWA would begin rolling out “compulsory” online social-media training to all of its 30,000 local staff members.