

UNITED STAFF FOR GAZA

Statement in Tribute to Philippe Lazzarini and UNRWA

31 March 2026

United Staff for Gaza expresses its **gratitude to Philippe Lazzarini**, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as he completes his tenure today after **six years of dedicated service**.

Mr. Lazzarini led UNRWA during the most challenging period in the Agency's history. The State of Israel has sought to dismantle it, including by **obstructing** its operations, **destroying and damaging** its facilities, **killing** hundreds of members of UNRWA personnel, and orchestrating **disinformation** campaigns against it. **“These attacks are unprecedented in the 80-year history of the United Nations,”** Mr. Lazzarini [wrote](#) in his parting words to the United Nations General Assembly.

Nevertheless, despite Israel's assault on UNRWA and a severe lack of meaningful support from the international community – which applauds UNRWA rhetorically but fails to provide it with the **political and financial support** it needs – the Agency has persisted in discharging its mandate to protect the rights and serve the needs of Palestine refugees.

“UNRWA has reached breaking point,” Mr. Lazzarini [warned](#) recently. **“It is incomprehensible that a UN entity has been allowed to be crushed as UNRWA has, in violation of international law, with total impunity,”** he said. Mr. Lazzarini faced extraordinarily difficult choices and strove to **preserve UNRWA** as the embodiment of the international community's commitment to the inalienable rights of Palestine refugees.

“Philippe Lazzarini has shown what principled leadership at the United Nations looks like,” said [Andrew Gilmour](#), Chair of United Staff for Gaza and the former UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights. **“His term of office coincided with the worst crisis ever endured by a UN agency, with hundreds of its staff members killed in Gaza in the line of duty or else targeted with their families in their homes. But his leadership and that of his colleagues will long be remembered for their courage, compassion, and determination in the face of unbearable pressures. He set a powerful example for the UN's future.”**

United Staff for Gaza reiterates its deepest **solidarity** with all colleagues at UNRWA and we express our best wishes to Mr. Lazzarini's eventual successor. **We appeal to Member States to defend UNRWA, protect its personnel, and ensure that it is equipped with the financial and political support it needs to fulfil its mandate.**

United Staff for Gaza stresses that a failure to save UNRWA from collapse would have dire ramifications: for Palestine refugees, for the stability of the Middle East region, and for the **viability of international order** as a whole. ///