

annual report 2018



unrwa
usa national committee

contents

letter from our leaders
2018 impact
our people
financial report



unrwa usa's mission

we aim to promote a life of dignity and human development for palestine refugees by informing the american public about unrwa's work and generating support for its programs in the gaza strip, the west bank (including east jerusalem), syria, lebanon, and jordan.

**we are dedicated to showing
palestine refugees that
americans care**

Dear friends,

This year was marked by the defunding of UNRWA by the current US administration, an unprecedented, dangerous, and shortsighted decision that flies in the face of the important work UNRWA has carried out in the fields of education, healthcare, social services, and emergency protection for millions of Palestine refugees since 1950. 70 years since the Nakba (meaning "catastrophe" in Arabic) and the continued absence of a just and durable solution to their plight, today, more than five million Palestine refugees continue to face occupation, statelessness, forced displacement, severe violence, and loss of shelters and livelihoods.

Amidst the politicization of humanitarian assistance, Americans, like yourself, showed an outpouring of support for Palestine refugees and UNRWA's work for them, even when our government chose not to.

You resoundingly said – through your actions, efforts, and contributions – that you believe funding UNRWA is not only a moral issue, but in line with the values this country was founded on. Together, we were able to contribute the greatest amount of financial support to UNRWA in a single year in our organization's history – thank you for making that possible.

In solidarity and gratitude,

Abby Smardon
Executive Director

Dear supporters,

In the past year the role of UNRWA USA continued to evolve, and our supporters continued to grow despite the absence of US government funding.

Internally, we saw positive changes on our team and new leadership on the board. I am honored to report that after serving as a member of the board for nine years, the board of directors elected me as the new chair of Board. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with our growing board, with our dedicated staff, and our compassionate donors. I am committed to build on the work that was done by the previous chair emeritus Ambassador (ret.) Philip C. Wilcox, Jr. His accomplishments and his outstanding stewardship of this great organization are greatly appreciated.

In 2019, I urge our supporters to continue to band together and take collective responsibility by ensuring that every Palestine refugee child have the opportunity to go to school, that every mother continues to receive maternal healthcare, and that every parent can put food on the table for their family. Though 2018 was a year of unrest and uncertainty, Americans came together and proved that we believe in the lives and dignity of Palestine refugees and the fulfillment of their potential. We have no doubt you will continue to show solidarity next year and beyond.

With immense gratitude,

Ghassan Salameh
Board Chair



food assistance in gaza

**22,361 families
provided with unrwa
food assistance**

Due to a decade of blockade, poverty, and unemployment refugees in the Gaza Strip are unable to access the market even when food is available. They are now forced to rely on humanitarian assistance from UNRWA for essentials like bread – not because they want to – but because, despite their education, they have no income options.

This Ramadan, the situation in Gaza was further exacerbated, due to a worsening humanitarian situation following the increased violence and killing

of Palestine refugees during the weekly Great March of Return demonstrations.

More dire still, due to the funding crisis precipitated by the US defunding, UNRWA food assistance was set to run out by the end of summer, leaving over one million Palestine refugees in Gaza at risk of not having food. Thanks, in part to the generous donations of Americans and grants through the Jerusalem Fund, the Agency was able to continue the program through 2018.

iftar for gaza

For the second year, UNRWA USA supporters chose to narrow the gap between the US and Gaza by bringing the thoughts, experiences, and struggles of Palestine refugee families into their homes and around their dining tables. Iftar for Gaza is an opportunity for individuals to host their friends and families for a charitable gathering that fundraises for UNRWA food assistance and raises awareness about food insecurity in Gaza.

Across the US, over the course of 30 days, 35 iftars were held – from picnics to potlucks to restaurant-

catered dinners -- raising over \$125,700, enough to supply food assistance to 839 refugee families! [See their creativity in action.](#)

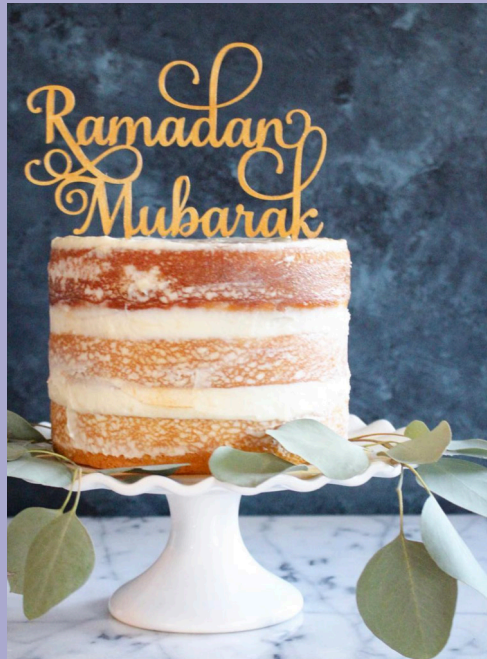
UNRWA USA held two of its own charitable iftars, one in [DC](#) and one in [NYC](#). Both events were experiential and interactive and featured authentic Middle Eastern cuisine. The program evoked a day in the life of a Palestine refugee in Gaza, and with the support of nearly 400 guests and friends, these two communities supplied 392 families with food assistance.



instagram influencers

During Ramadan, 20 Instagram influencers chose to use their public platforms to share information and photos on the situation unfolding in Gaza, the increased need, what UNRWA does to support over one million refugees there, and how their followers could help provide meals to refugee families through UNRWA's food assistance program.

These influencers shared [personal videos](#), stories, and photos to demonstrate why they believe in the cause throughout the one-month long Instagram campaign.



amandasplate • Following

amandasplate Ramadan Kareem everyone! 💕🌟 While we may have lots of pretty food, reality is many do not have enough to eat. This Ramadan, I have partnered with @unrwausa and some amazing influencers to raise funds for Gaza! 🙏 You have seen the horrific situation happening in Gaza right now💔 and they need our prayers and they also need our support in providing them aid. I have set a goal of \$3500, which will directly feed Palestine refugee families for the entire summer. 🇺🇸 The US administration cut funding to UNRWA by \$300 million this year! These cuts impact thousands of families in Gaza. 😞 We can do something about it. 🙏 Please donate to my campaign (LINK IN BIO)💕 Any amount makes a difference. This is the month of mercy and giving, so let's give back to the people of Gaza and show them we care. #gazalifeline #FundUNRWA



1,752 likes

MAY 16

Add a comment...





mental health in gaza

31,502 students, parents, and teachers supported with mental health counseling services + 37 part-time mental health counselors' salaries funded for a year

Children in Gaza ages 10 and older have lived through three major Israeli military assaults. More than half the population is suffering from PTSD or some other form of psychological trauma. There is no escape; 90% of UNRWA's 278,938 students have never left Gaza. Individuals, along with partners Human Concern International, Jerusalem Fund, Ottawa Run for Palestine, McMillan Stewart Foundation, the Canadian Palestinian Professional Foundation chose to improve the quality of life for children in Gaza and give them hope for the future by supporting UNRWA's Community Mental Health Programme (CMHP), where trained UNRWA counselors, refugees themselves, help mitigate the psychological impact of trauma through individual and group therapy sessions.

moving for mental health: gaza 5k



For the first year, UNRWA USA brought the Gaza 5K + Dabke Party south to [Houston, Texas](#), in addition to hosting the signature walk/run for the fourth year in [NYC](#) and seventh year in [DC](#). Across all three events, thousands of participants fundraised, ran, jogged, walked, and dabke danced to provide UNRWA psychosocial services and support for thousands of kids.

Highlights included live DJs and an UNRWA 101 take action tent, where supporters could educate themselves on mental health concerns in Gaza, see examples of the type of mental health activities children partake in, and sign a letter to Congress urging the US government to restore funding to UNRWA.



Additionally, our northern neighbors in Canada organized the Ottawa Run for Palestine, an annual walk/run benefiting UNRWA's mental health services. Hundreds attended this 2K, 5K, and 10K run/walk event, followed by kids activities, a BBQ, dabke, and live singing; ultimately, this event allowed 6,333 Palestine refugee students across dozens of UNRWA schools in Gaza access to psychosocial support.

As part of UNRWA USA's efforts to draw attention and awareness among American leadership to the social and psychological suffering of Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip and the ways in which NGOs, international, and UN organizations, like UNRWA attempt to address this catastrophe, UNRWA USA participated in the Congressional Briefing on Mental Health in the Gaza Strip.





Many refugees in Gaza rely on short term employment opportunities. Those chosen for the opportunities funded by UNRWA USA were some of the most vulnerable and poor Palestine refugees, along with fresh graduates from UNRWA departments, to give them opportunities to build their future in an increasingly harsh job climate.

This program impacted those beyond the refugees employed, as it injected much needed money into Gaza's rapidly de-developing economy.

job creation program

1,930 refugees in gaza employed via short term work opportunities



fund unrwa

This year, in an unprecedented and purely political decision, the US government, formerly the single largest contributor to UNRWA globally, drastically reduced and ultimately cut all funding to the Agency. In 2016 and 2017, the US contributed one third of the Agency's budget, or \$368 million a year, and in 2018, the Agency cut \$300 million and then announced to suspend funding in 2019 and beyond. This decision has caused uncertainty to whether UNRWA would have the ability to run its 700+ schools for half a million refugee girls and boys, operate its 140+ health centers, provide food assistance to over one million Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip, and provide other humanitarian and development services for more than five million Palestine refugees, nearly 27,000 of whom are employed by Agency, itself.

In response, UNRWA USA launched 'Fund UNRWA,' a year-long campaign to perform critical fundraising among the American people following the US government's defunding.

In response, Americans contributed an unprecedented \$3.5 million to support UNRWA's humanitarian efforts, along with contacting their congressional leaders to tell them that UNRWA's work – or the work of any UN humanitarian agency – should never be politicized. Funds raised through the Fund UNRWA campaign were prioritized for the Agency's most urgent needs, programs, and services and assisted in filling the great funding gap left by the US government.

unrwa university scholarships

funding the future of 79 unrwa scholars

Education is seen as the key to success among Palestine refugees. Denied many of their most basic rights and the ability to return to their homes, refugees deeply value education as something no person or conflict can take from them.

UNRWA USA scholarships are funded by individual donors, families and foundations including the Canadian Palestinian Professional Foundation (CPPF), Palestinian American Bridge (PAB), and Qatar Foundation International (QFI). They help refugee students fulfill this dream and achieve their fullest professional and personal potential.



funding the future

message from an unrwa university scholar

Throughout my life, I've spent all my time outside school helping my family survive. I still remember my first job at age 8. I was a messenger transporting medicine between pharmacies in my area on my small bicycle. I earned no more than \$3 a day. I was naive at the time, but the responsibility made me mature quickly and take life seriously. I learned at that time the importance of education and the difference it could make in my life, so I put it on the top of my priorities. I studied very, very hard. In my 9th grade class, I ranked first in a math competition among all the schools in the north of the West Bank. In secondary school I received 99% in my science classes.

Despite this, it seemed impossible to go to university because of the cost of tuition. But fortunately, CPPF's generous donation made this dream possible. Now, I'm in my fifth year of the medical program. Because I don't have to worry about paying for university, I can focus on my studies and have finished my first four years with an excellent GPA.

I'm hoping to get matched in a hospital in the US and hope to study dermatology, ophthalmic surgery, or pulmonary ICU. It's not an easy route, but it's definitely worth it, and I'm so grateful for my scholarship – it makes a huge difference in my life and motivates me to do my best!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mouath".

Mouath Abu Hamdah is a 22 year old medical student from Askar refugee camp in Nablus, the West Bank. Thanks to his scholarship, Mouath can focus on his studies, volunteer work, and preparing for his USMLE exams, which are required to apply for US-based specialty programs.



shelter repair in gaza

60 families' shelters in gaza repaired benefiting 379 palestine refugees in gaza

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This is a truly wonderful program. It provides Palestine refugees with the tools and funding they need to repair their houses, putting them in control of the process.

- Halil Demir, Zakat Foundation
Executive Director

Palestine refugees in Gaza, who have already faced one or more displacements, continue to reel from the effects of the 2014 Israeli military assault, unable to rebuild due to the decade long blockade and limited ability to bring reconstruction materials into Gaza. As of 2018, thousands of refugee houses remain uninhabitable, but in partnership with Firedoll Foundation and Zakat Foundation, UNRWA USA funded the reconstruction and/or restoration of 60 refugee shelters. These longstanding partnerships have been especially critical at a time of massive defunding of services benefiting Palestine refugees. Not only did this project improve the quality of life of hundreds of refugees by fulfilling their basic shelter needs, but it also provided employment opportunities to refugees who carried out the jobs.

lifeline for gaza

great march of return

After more than a decade of stifling blockade, tens of thousands of refugees in Gaza, who have the right to peaceful assembly and expression, are participating in weekly protests against the inhumane conditions under which they are forced to live. These demonstrations, known as the Great March of Return, have continued every week since March 30, 2018.

The diverse participants are demanding an end to the blockade and their right to return to their ancestral homes. These marches have been met with indiscriminate force and have resulted in many deaths, including UNRWA students, and thousands of serious injuries, many of which will have life-long consequences. Many of the refugees injured received medical care at UNRWA health centers because hospitals in Gaza were constantly overflowing with patients



lifeline for gaza

providing hospitalization for 442 palestine refugees in gaza

“

This is a situation completely underestimated by the world. More people were injured in about 10 days of mostly peaceful demonstrations than during the 50 days of an all-out war in 2014. This should have generated far more robust reactions.

- UNRWA Commissioner-General
Pierre Krähenbühl, June 2018



Caring for the injured has placed enormous strain on an already crumbling health system, facing chronic shortages of electricity, medical supplies, and equipment, along with Israeli-imposed restrictions on movement preventing patients from receiving medical care outside of Gaza. In order to prioritize the influx of patients injured during demonstrations, non-trauma emergency surgeries were suspended by public hospitals. Many of the patients whose surgeries were suspended sought interim care at UNRWA health clinics as they awaited hospital admission. In response, UNRWA's hospitalization program coordinated referrals to private hospitals and funded surgeries suspended by public hospitals. With the financial support of the Jerusalem Fund and ICNA Relief Canada, 442 Palestine refugees were provided with the surgeries and follow-up care they required.



adopt-a-school
in gaza

protecting the right to education for 2,632 refugee girls

As a result of Ray of Light Foundation's (ROL) support, more than 2,600 Palestine refugee girls accessed inclusive, high-quality education at Jabalia Elementary Girls School and Rafah Preparatory Girls School in the Gaza Strip.

In a community where more than half the population is unemployed, ROL's contributions funded female teachers' salaries. The teachers, refugee women themselves, were empowered to provide for their families and improve their financial situations, while working to deliver a dedicated human rights curriculum and a safe learning space to thousands of girls during the 2018-2019 scholastic year.

A school counselor at Jabalia shared, "in a difficult environment like Gaza, where children often face poverty and violence, the most important thing is to create a safe and protected school environment where children can learn, play, and enjoy their childhood."



My favorite subject in school is science. My teacher helps me to pursue my dream of being a scientist. She uses songs about biology, chemistry, and physics to make it more fun to learn...and it works! She always takes time to explain research and shows us how to do cool experiments.



Fatima is an 11 year old student at Jabalia Elementary School, which was bombed during the 2014 Israeli military assault on Gaza. She aspires to be a scientist so she can create medicines to help those suffering in Gaza and around the world.



jarrah's first step

climbing everest base camp to save his unrwa school in jordan



Jarrah Alhawamdeh is redefining what it means to be a refugee, an amputee, and an athlete. At age 15, he was diagnosed with bone cancer and had to have his right leg amputated, but in the face of these obstacles, he did not let cancer stop him from pursuing his dreams. In fact, he credits much of his determination and focus to the support he was given by his UNRWA teachers.

However, following the US funding cuts, Al Jofeh, the UNRWA school he attended for ten years in Jordan, was at risk of closure. Moved, quite literally, to take action, he created a fundraiser 'My First Step,' where he asked others to take one step, as he took 17,500 up to Mt. Everest Base Camp to help save his UNRWA school. At age 22, this cancer survivor and amputee redefined impossible, summiting Everest Base Camp in April 2018 while raising over \$30,000 to support teacher salaries at his former school.

Celebrity support: from the Founder and CEO of Chobani, Hamdi Ulukaya to Queen Noor, to actress and comedian Sarah Silverman, and actress Kristin Bauer of HBO's True Blood, influential supporters cheered on Jarrah from afar, and urged their followers to support his climb.

us community engagement

voices of unrwa blog

Amidst the funding crisis, there is increased importance in shifting the narrative around UNRWA, the role the Agency plays in maintaining the lives and dignity of over 5 million refugees, and humanizing refugees, whose lives and futures have otherwise been caught up in a political debate. In doing so, and highlighting the 'voices of UNRWA,' we aim to introduce the American public to supporters of our work, former UNRWA beneficiaries making an impact stateside, and amplify the often-dampened voice of refugees, themselves. **Some highlights from 2018 include:**

- [ibtissam's message to the us administration: "think of the children and their future"](#)
- [from palestine to syria to ohio: dr. yanes' story](#)
- [meet ghassan salameh: unrwa usa's new board chair](#)
- [why iftar for gaza has become a tradition at coney island prep high school](#)
- [from gaza to north carolina: mohammed eid's refugee story](#)
- [world refugee day: humanitarian workers, the backbone of unrwa's work in syria](#)
- [three women. two unrwa usa events. one unexpected friendship.](#)
- [founder of palestine marathon runs nyc marathon to raise money for unrwa usa](#)
- [unrwa changed my life and the lives of many people around me: dr. shadi battah's unrwa story](#)
- [going the extra mile for palestine refugees in 2018](#)



let's talk unrwa



In 2018, UNRWA USA launched Let's Talk UNRWA, a Facebook Live event series bringing UNRWA leaders and experts into supporters' homes, allowing Americans an opportunity to learn and ask questions about UNRWA's work directly from those implementing and affected by it.

[All past episodes are available for streaming](#)



refugee speaking series

Mohammed Eid, a Palestine refugee from Gaza, UNRWA alum, Rotary Peace Fellow, and current North Carolina resident, joined UNRWA USA in a speaking tour in the fall of 2018.

He visited local groups and supporters along the East Coast in Pennsylvania and Delaware and the West Coast in Washington and California to share his story of how it was to grow up in the Gaza Strip as a refugee, the role UNRWA played, and how the US government's de-funding impacts the lives of millions of refugees in the region.

In a time where refugee voices, especially those from Gaza, are being marginalized or silenced, it was all the more critical to hear and learn from the valuable perspectives of Palestine refugees like Moh.



our people

staff

abby smardon

executive director

laila mokhiber

director of
communications

lori mosher

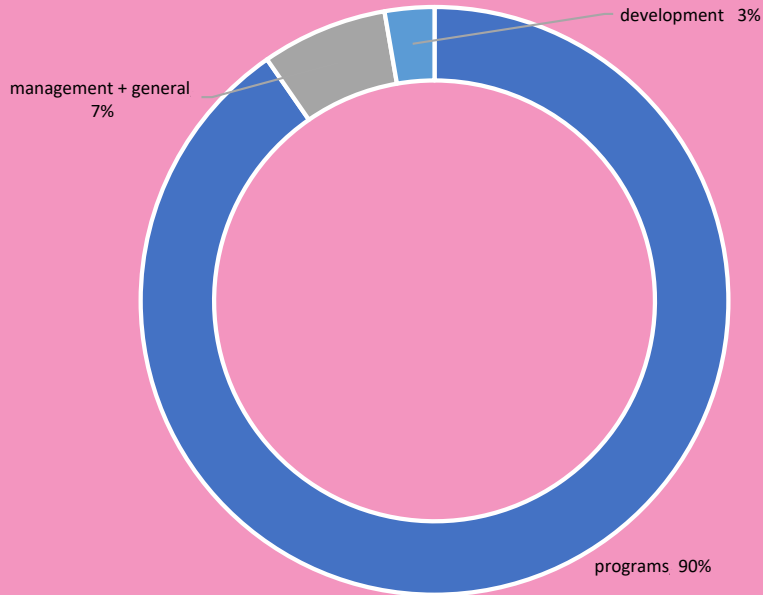
maryan abdelmesih
medhini kumar
ruben kahvedjian
harley dority

board members

ghassan salameh, board chair
ambassador (ret.) philip c. wilcox, jr., chair emeritus
ambassador (ret.) maura connelly, compensation chair
ambassador (ret.) richard w. murphy
karen abu zayd, former unrwa commissioner-general
maggie mitchell salem
ryan crocker
elias aburdene
shibley telhami
george salem



our finances



allocation of expenses

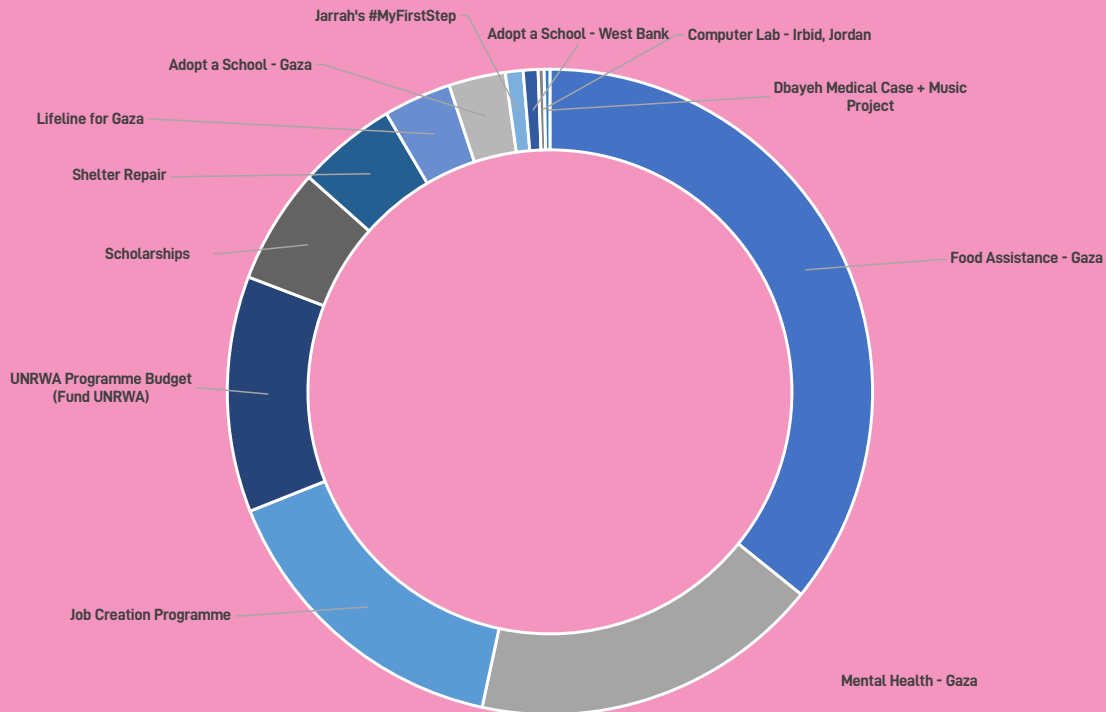
In 2018, UNRWA USA's program to expense ratio was 90%, meaning out of every dollar collected, 90 cents went to Palestine refugees in need.

UNRWA USA has received a platinum rating, the highest level of recognition offered by Guidestar.

[2018 form 990](#)

our finances

program allocation of funds sent to unrwa fields





showing palestine refugees
that americans care



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