



**unrwa**  
usa national committee

# annual report

showing palestine refugees that americans care

2019



# highlights



PAGE 05

## fostering resilience + holistic well-being

### SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR KIDS

In the absence of US government funding, the American public stepped up their efforts. UNRWA USA support for this program proved vital, and contributed to the rehiring of full-time counselors in 2019. Read how together we supported 27,511 students, parents, and teachers with mental health and psycho-social services and we supported the salaries of 48 part-time and 15 full-time mental health counselors, who are refugees themselves! >>



PAGE 11

## nourishing families

### PROVIDING FOOD ASSISTANCE FOR REFUGEE FAMILIES

Through an innovative Gather for Gaza event series held across the US, a social media campaign, and public support, Americans put food on the table for Palestine refugees during the month of Ramadan. Hear directly from the Abdelah family, one of 13,305 families who received food assistance thanks to UNRWA USA supporters.

## advocating for unrwa

### BRINGING PALESTINE REFUGEE VOICES TO CONGRESS

UNRWA USA held its first-ever advocacy day on September 26, 2019, where relay runners (from the Relay Run for Refugees in partnership with Right to Movement Palestine), UNRWA alumni, UNRWA student parliamentarians met with key lawmakers and their staff to educate them on how UNRWA's work represents a good humanitarian investment that also supports the national security interests of our country.

PAGE 19



## building solidarity

### SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE AROUND REFUGEES TOGETHER

Change doesn't happen alone. UNRWA USA partnered with several like-minded organizations in 2019 to host events and fundraisers and fund special projects to shape the narrative around Palestine refugees, amplify their voices, and educate the broader US public on UNRWA's work for them.

PAGE 27





# letter from our leaders

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**“UNRWA has been for the last 70 years the provider of essential food, health, housing, and education services for Palestine refugees and by extension, the pathway to a better life for millions. It’s a difficult time for refugees here in the United States and around the globe. The fact that the US has cut hundreds of millions of support to UNRWA makes things even more dire. This motivates us even more to strengthen America’s knowledge of an empathy for the plight of Palestine refugees. We are inspired by these refugees and their determination to live in dignity.”**

**- Mara Kronenfeld, Executive Director**

The absence of over \$300 million of funding from the US government, formerly the largest donor to UNRWA, put critical UNRWA services at risk for a second year in a row. This political defunding of humanitarian assistance threatened food assistance for one million Palestine refugees and education for half a million girls and boys, and jeopardized the lives and wellbeing of Palestine refugees, regional stability and safety, and opportunities for a peaceful, just, and durable future. This massive gap was on top of years of chronic underfunding for humanitarian issues and aggravated by general political rhetoric which continues to demonize and marginalize the displaced.

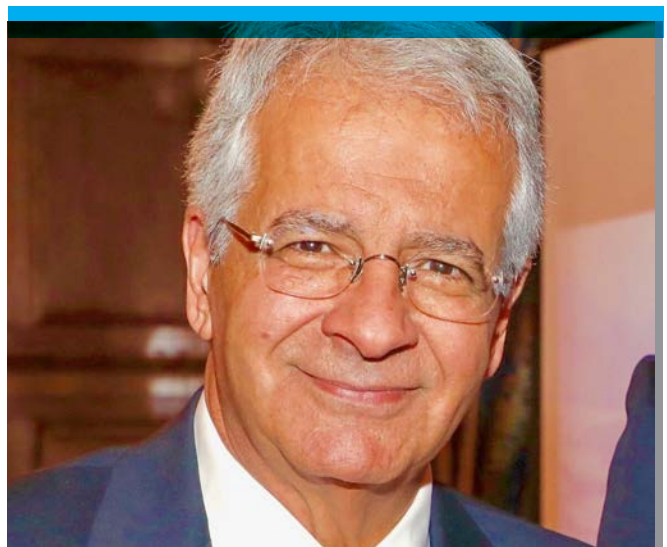
Despite the dangerous decisions of the Trump administration, individual Americans' collective efforts have fed families, provided mental healthcare, and funded children's right to education and play. Individuals like yourself understand that humanitarian work should not be politicized, that Palestine refugees have the right to live healthy, productive lives, and that we have the power to amplify their voices, advance their rights and wellbeing, and demand action and change.

In 2019, Americans answered this call by funding at-risk programs, contacting congressional leaders and participating in UNRWA USA's first-ever advocacy day, running and fundraising for Gaza 5K walk/runs across the US, supporting the historic Relay Run for Refugees, hosting charitable events, and more. Because of this action by individual Americans and foundations, UNRWA USA is in the top five among highest non-governmental contributors to the Agency, providing more in funding than 33 other countries.

In 2019, we also saw internal changes to our team. We grew, hiring on three new team members, bringing years of additional managerial and international experience to the team, but we also said a bittersweet farewell to former Executive Director Abby Smardon, who left after 11 years of dedicated service and achievements.

As we look towards 2020 and acknowledge the growing number of refugees and increased humanitarian needs, we draw hope from the support we've received from generous Americans like you and the achievements we've accomplished. Together, we hope to see a future where Palestine refugees, and all people, can realize their fullest potential.

Mara Kronenfeld, Executive Director + Ghassan Salameh, Board Chair



## fostering resilience and holistic

27,511 students, parents, and teachers supported with mental health and psycho-social services + 48 part-time and 15 full-time mental health counselors' salaries funded for a year



*The only way for the children of Gaza to live a healthy and successful life is if they have good mental health. We all come together at the Gaza 5K to help UNRWA get the funding and resources it needs and to be a voice for the children of Gaza and to let them know that they will do what it takes to help provide them with the mental health they need.*

*-Rativa Dolah, team captain of the 2019 NYC Gaza 5K 'Peace for Palestine' team*



# AL HEALTH >>

## wellbeing

from the united states to palestine, no person should have to suffer constant distress.

### moving for mental health at the gaza 5k

In Gaza, UNRWA's mental health program employs trained social workers as well as specialized mental health counselors in both schools and health centers, mostly refugees themselves, and provides both individual and targeted group counseling.

This particular program was primarily funded by the US government, and following the US' defunding, UNRWA was forced to discontinue the Community Mental Health Programme as a standalone intervention and downgrade counselors from full-time (40 hours) to part-time (20 hours) in 2018. Counselors who serve an average of 1,000 students were left with less than a minute per student each week. The mental health program was integrated within existing UNRWA education and health services, as a result, but capacity was crippled.

In the absence of US government funding, the American public stepped up their efforts. UNRWA USA support for this program proved vital, and contributed to the rehiring of full-time counselors in 2019.

The primary way Americans supported mental health in Gaza was through [UNRWA USA Gaza 5K walk/runs](#) held across the country in New York, Houston, and Washington, DC in 2019.



### [Meet the 13-year-old who raised \\$25K for refugee kids her age in Gaza through the Gaza 5K](#)



Dunia, a superstar fundraiser, shares her motivation for fundraising and encourages people of all ages, genders, and abilities to join her efforts. [Watch>>](#)

# great march of return

**W**eekly “Great March of Return” (GMR) demonstrations in Gaza, which started in March 2018, continued through 2019. While largely nonviolent, Israeli military forces responded with tear gas, rubber bullets, and live ammunition, mostly by snipers, killing 214 Palestinians, including 46 children, 13 of whom attended UNRWA schools. Over 36,100 people were injured, of which one in five were killed by live ammunition; 227 of those injured were UNRWA students.

The GMR demonstrations have also had widespread mental health and psychosocial consequences. Impacted people include those injured during the protests, particularly those who sustained physical disability, their caregivers, those who were directly exposed to extreme violence, especially children, and people who lost a family member.

In 2020, an estimated 10,400 people will suffer severe mental health problems in connection to the GMR demonstrations, of which approximately 22,500 are children.

Behind these shocking and tragic numbers are stories of lives curtailed or limited in some way. Through their own experiences and through supporting others, [UNRWA counselors witness firsthand the physical and psychological trauma this violence has left.](#)

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[Eirik Kollrud, UNRWA's Liaison Officer in Washington, DC provides an update on how UNRWA has pivoted its health services amidst COVID-19 >>](#)





## An UNRWA counselor shares his heartfelt and heartbreaking words:

I've been working as a psychological counselor for nearly 10 years. I work at an UNRWA boys' school and the Great March of Return has had a huge impact on our students many of whom have attended the demonstrations. I think we have to stress what makes our students participate: it's the blockade. These kids don't have hope, they don't have dignity, they cannot leave Gaza, they have no employment opportunities, there's no electricity, they lack money...the poverty, the economic pressure; it's severe. Students here have a very difficult life. We have around 20 students in my school who have been injured in the marches, they are mostly 14-15 years old. They have been injured in a variety of ways: live ammunition, shrapnel, tear gas canisters, and rubber bullets...The injuries have a huge impact - especially on those with permanent disabilities who can't participate in sports, who can't live normal lives. They become isolated socially. I see the psychological impact. These boys become withdrawn, they aren't able to focus and concentrate in class, and they have nightmares about what happened. And then there are the students who have lost family members. One student lost his father who was shot in the head during the demonstrations. Others have had their fathers or brothers injured. There are two cases where the father has undergone amputation. The students are so affected by this. Their behavior changes; they have problems with teachers and other students.\*

Given these increased needs, the lack of US government funding, and now with the spread of coronavirus, UNRWA USA remains committed to funding and strengthening UNRWA's life-changing mental health services.

\*UNRWA counselor from the Gaza Strip who wishes to remain anonymous

## building dreams and manifesting

1,870 children and youth participated in summer camps; this included one youth camp, 20 children's camps in 20 different locations around the West Bank, and one inclusive summer camp for children with disabilities and their caregivers

hear from tala, rayyan, and muath



# WINTER CAMPS > >

## g hope



### a note from dawlat siam, unrwa psychosocial counselor at al-am'ari and jalazone clinics

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*This year we have worked on activities that encourage children to dream. This is important as these children face abnormal obstacles and difficulties, including the occupation, violence, camp crowdedness, poverty, and a lack of recreational activities. We work on helping them express their feelings and work to instill mental strength to move forward, adapt to reality, create a vision/dream, and change the situations they live in. Where do we see the impact? We see it when we go back to the camps; we see how those children are developing positively. Their parents said their children have changed. Mothers told us that their children stopped being nervous, started helping their parents and began understanding their siblings and friends. These changes came from a four-day camp.*

“

# nurturing families



## 13,305 families (66,878 individuals) received UNRWA food assistance

Again in 2019, compassionate UNRWA USA supporters and partners stepped up, helping ensure UNRWA's at-risk food assistance program, a lifeline for refugees in Gaza, provided food for families earning less than a few dollars a day, like the Abdelah family.

Hesham Abdelah is a 51-year-old Palestine refugee father who lives along with his family in Beach Camp, one of the most crowded camps in the Gaza Strip. Plagued with poverty and the responsibility of feeding his six children, Hesham never surrendered to despair, portraying a model of resilience: "I know the situation is very difficult, and work opportunities are very limited for youth, not mentioning the old, but, I never stopped trying to search for work." Hesham and his wife Suad (left) are among many other Palestine refugees who are suffering from the aftermath of a long-standing blockade, recurrent conflicts, compounded with deepening poverty. "I received a diploma in electronic communications; however, I could not continue work in this field due to an eye injury. I attempted other professions, but the situation in Gaza is getting worse. My search for a job has gone in vain for the last three years," Hesham adds. "Amidst such hardships, food assistance is very crucial for my children," says Suad. "I prepare hot milk for them every morning before they go to school and make homemade cheese, falafel using the chickpeas, and baked goods from the wheat. We rely on UNRWA to secure our food."

Thanks to the generosity of UNRWA USA supporters and UNRWA's food assistance program, families like the Abdelah's had one fewer thing to worry about this year.

# FOOD A



UNRWA alum Dr. Yassine Daoud, alongside his daughter and wife, celebrated journalist Laila El-Haddad at their 2019 Gather for Gaza event

“Gather for Gaza is a marvelous way to share the Palestinian struggle with friends and family in a convivial, non-threatening setting. As we gathered for delicious Palestinian food, our conversation ranged across our varied experiences with Palestine. The discussion and information cards provided [by UNRWA USA] were great conversation starters and kept the ideas flowing. [I] can’t wait to do it again!”

- Lesley, Evanston, IL, Gather for Gather participant


**27 charitable events, 541 refugee families supported**

From NYC to California, 27 supporters held innovative events and iftars as part of the **Gather for Gaza event series** and raised enough to assist 541 refugee families. **35 social media influencers and brands partnered up with UNRWA USA** and used their Instagram platforms throughout the month of Ramadan to raise \$200,000 from their followers, further raising awareness of the needs of refugees in Gaza!

**See the highlights >>**

**GATHER**  
for  
**GAZA**

**ASSISTANCE >**



“ This school is my second home, literally. When I arrive, I first do sports then we go to classes. We all love the break in the middle of the day because it is the time to enjoy, eat, and laugh with our friends. Our teachers look after us as if we are their daughters.”



## school is rahaf's source of light

Rahaf, 11, is a hopeful elementary school student and a Palestine refugee living in the Gaza Strip. She has lived her entire life under a brutal blockade and witnessed the devastating loss of an important role model at a young age -- Rahaf's father died unexpectedly of a heart attack at the age of 34 which left a huge gap in her life.

Rahaf's mother, who used to work as a teacher, is now a single parent and has to play the role of both parents. Rahaf hopes to be a teacher in the future, like her mother who is deeply dedicated to paving the way for her four children's success. Rahaf believes that "teachers are like golden diamonds among jewelries and the leaders of all generations" and sees school as a source of light and a way to escape her intense feelings of loss.

Rahaf is a dedicated student and her serious passion for reading and teaching makes her a great role model for her siblings and classmates. She showcases this through her monthly participation in UNRWA's Little Teacher Initiative which is where students act as teachers to summarize class lessons. Not only does she enjoy reading children's stories on her own, but she often narrates them with confidence in front of her peers. Rahaf is an active participant in a number of school activities.

Moreover, what makes school so special for Rahaf is the laboratory where she conducts science experiments and the computer lab where students have an opportunity to explore a wide number of programs. Because of Rahaf's

excellence, her teachers assign her higher level worksheets - a major self-confidence booster. Due to Rahaf's family precarious living conditions, the school supports her with the provision of winter clothes, stationery, shoes, and daily meals for which Rahaf and her family are exceedingly thankful. Her UNRWA school principal describes her pride and optimism: "Rahaf is excellent, polite, and loved by all her classmates and teachers. She has excellent attendance and is always neat and tidy. When speaking with her, you feel that you are talking to an adult, not an 11 year old child. She is ambitious regardless of her difficult family situation. I'm sure she will fulfill her dreams and achieve greatness in this world."



# adopt-a-school: funding learning

UNRWA USA partnered with Ray of Light Foundation, which supported salaries for 16 female teachers at the Jabalia Elementary Girls School and Rafah Preparatory Girls School in Gaza. Additionally, UNRWA USA received its largest multi-year grant from long-time partner Zakat Foundation of America (ZFA), who adopted the Abu Tu'ema School in Gaza, enabling the ongoing education of 2,340 girls and boys in grades 1-9 during the 2019-2020 scholastic year through the support of 59 teacher salaries over five months and six deputy school principals and other administrative staff over four months.

“

The school is the place where we all can reach our full potential and achieve our dreams. Without it, we are literally nothing. My school teachers boost my self-confidence and give me the sensation of being a leader -- something I have always wanted to feel. Life without school is like a tree without its leaves.

- Nada Saedi El-Aloul, 12, UNRWA student at Rafah Preparatory Girls' School, the Gaza Strip



*“By committing our support to the entire school, including its faculty, we commit to the larger community. Secure funding for the full school year assures quality education for these young refugees. Commitment to quality education is deeply rooted in Zakat Foundation. I was raised in a poor and remote community with few resources. Despite that, my mother was passionately committed to education for me and my siblings. She understood it was our way to a better life. I hold these values very close to my heart and want the same avenues of opportunity for the Palestine refugee children at the Abu Tu'ema School.”*

- Halil Demir, Executive Director of Zakat Foundation of America (ZFA)





## house demolition recovery: burqan family case study

### supporting resilience: 95 refugee families were provided assistance, assisting 554 individual victims of forcible displacement, settler violence and/or israeli military operations

**H**eba Burqan and her husband Anas got married in 2009 and have four children Majd (9), Batool (7), Juri (6), and Ali (1). The Burqan family had a house in beautiful, lush Wadi Yasul, East Jerusalem, where they lived alongside many members of their extended family. They painted the walls in different bright colors and they made a garden in the courtyard where they grew mint and flowers.

In 2019, they were among 100 homes in East Jerusalem that the Israeli military started to demolish over the course of a few weeks, displacing hundreds of Palestinians day by day. This is part of an ongoing practice of forced displacement, a practice determined illegal under international law, that saw a spike in 2019.

On April 30, the Israeli police finally came to demolish Heba's and Anas' house. It was 6:00 in the morning when noise from outside suddenly woke the family up. Before they had realized what was going on, the entire neighborhood rushed to help and stop the demolition. They tried to block the police with their cars and Heba's brother-in-law tied himself to the gate, but to no avail – the policemen reached the house. "We are going to demolish your house on top of your head," one of them shouted through the window in Arabic. Coming into the courtyard, which by then was full of neighbors, the policemen beat up anyone in their way.

*"UNRWA support has been crucial: after the demolition, even if we received some help from our community, we would no longer be able to support ourselves without UNRWA."*

As this happened Heba could only think about protecting her children. "The kids were terrified of the chaotic situation, they kept screaming to the policemen to stop beating their dad; he was





arrested and they thought he was dead,” said Heba, who at that moment, decided to take her children and leave the house, as she could not bear her children witnessing such violence. She let her children into the car as soon as possible and she left the area. Only a few moments later she realized Majd was not there. They only found him when coming back after the police had left, hidden in the garden. He did not want to leave his home. But now everything had been destroyed, the family could only save a few pieces of kitchen furniture. The police even demolished the animal shelter and the olive trees surrounding the garden.

In the following days Heba with Ali and Majid moved to her father-in-law’s house while Juri and Batool went to live with Heba’s mother. Anas was taken to court and charged with assaulting a public official. A few days later, Heba and her mother-in-law were summoned to the police station for questioning. Anas was released four days later with a ban to visit the area of his demolished house.

“I remember that the social workers from UNRWA Crisis Intervention Unit even had come before the demolition took place, but we were scared and suspicious, so we didn’t accept UNRWA help at the time,” Heba explains. “However, UNRWA social workers returned after the demolition and immediately helped us through psychological support especially for the kids. Then, thanks to UNRWA cash assistance we were able to buy new furniture, clothes for the children, food, and we were able to pay three months’ rent for a new apartment.” She concludes “UNRWA support has been crucial: after the demolition, even if we received some help from our community, we would no longer be able to support ourselves without UNRWA.”

After assessing Heba’s family needs, UNRWA provided case management and referrals to specialized service. This included psychological support, food parcels, non-food items, and toys for the kids. The case management was prolonged due to the extent of the trauma Heba’s family endured, and it wasn’t until the end of 2019 before the family started to recover. In terms of financial support, the family received two payments, one initially right after the incident to help with immediate ramifications of the incident and the second, three months after to help rent and secure house accommodations for the family.

# RELAY RUN FOR REFUGEES



the run of the century

***250 miles.  
5 days.  
1 message:  
unrwa  
needs  
america's  
investment***

**H**umanitarian assistance should never be politicized, but that's what happened when the United States, UNRWA's largest donor for decades, suddenly defunded the Agency in 2018.

In response, runners and refugees from Palestine participated in a Relay Run for Refugees, a 250-mile run from NYC to DC, hosted by UNRWA USA in partnership with Right to Movement (RTM) Palestine.

The intention behind what will go down in history as "the run of the century" was to urge the US government to put humanitarian assistance ahead of politics and back in line with American values; doing so would ensure Palestine refugees, who have nowhere else to turn,

have uninterrupted access to education, food assistance, healthcare, and other programs.

The relay began on Friday, September 20, in NYC at the start of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and ended on Wednesday, September 25, in Washington, DC at the steps of the US Capitol Building. Each day of running concluded with a 'Refugees Reimagined' storytelling event hosted by community partners in Clifton, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Wilmington, Delaware, and Baltimore, Maryland [See the highlights>>](#)

The effort by these runners was complemented by your letters to Congress. [You can see our latest call to action and take part here >>](#)



**“This [relay] run of the century is important because education is our most powerful tool to build our future country, where we will have access to all rights and the ability to move freely.”**



Dina is from Ramallah, Palestine. She is one of the runners who traveled all the way from the West Bank to run 250 miles down the East Coast because she believes Palestinians deserve the same rights as those enjoyed by many citizens of the world. By running alongside her Right to Movement team, she sent this message to the US government that Palestine refugees’ right to movement, education, and basic services shouldn’t be used as a political tool and that US funding to UNRWA should be reinstated.

[\*\*Watch the Relay Run for Refugees short film >>\*\*](#)

“

I personally value the work of UNRWA in Palestine and consider myself an UNRWA child as my mother been serving the institution working for the office in Jerusalem for 35 years. The relay run cemented a special bond between Right to Movement and UNRWA USA. Carrying the torch of raising awareness for Palestinian and Palestine refugee rights, nine of our runners traveled to the US to run. All of us at RTM believe in the work that UNRWA USA is doing to better the lives of millions of refugees!

”

**- GEORGE ZEIDAN, RIGHT TO MOVEMENT PALESTINE**



# ADVOCACY DAY

## bringing the voices, needs, and hopes of palestine refugees to congress

UNRWA USA held its first-ever advocacy day on September 26, 2019, where staff, relay runners, UNRWA alumni, and UNRWA student parliamentarians, and other constituents met with key lawmakers and their staff to educate them on how UNRWA's work represents a good humanitarian investment that also supports the national security interests of our country. Some of the most compelling testimonies came from the parliamentarians and alumni who could attest, first hand, to the important work UNRWA does.

### unrwa student parliamentarians amplify their voices + those of their peers: hear their testimonies

Hanan (bottom left) is a 15 year-old student at UNRWA's Halhoul Elementary Girls School in Hebron, the occupied West Bank. Hanan is a member of the UNRWA Agency-wide Student Parliament, and the president of Hebron and Bethlehem area Student Parliaments. She enjoys drawing, playing volleyball, reciting poems, and playing oud and the organ. When she grows up she hopes to become a neurosurgeon. Get to know Hanan, who

shares what her UNRWA education means to young girls like her and the message she came all the way to the United States to share.

Hatem (bottom right) is a 15 year-old student at UNRWA's Gaza Preparatory Boys School (C), where he was elected as vice-president of the Gaza Student Parliament. He also serves as a member of the Agency-wide student parliament,

representing 526,000 UNRWA students. He enjoys writing poetry, singing, and playing football. When he grows up he wants to be "the world's best surgeon" so he can save lives. Get to know Hatem, as he shares his responsibilities to his fellow students during a trip to Washington, DC in 2019.





UNRWA USA's 2019 advocacy day was an important complement to the Agency's efforts to educate Washington, DC, policymakers about the importance of UNRWA to addressing the needs of Palestine refugees. Thanks to UNRWA USA's efforts, lawmakers and their staff were able to hear first-hand about the importance of UNRWA's education, health and social services. Many of those addressing lawmakers had directly benefited from UNRWA's services. This kind of educational effort is critical to UNRWA's ongoing efforts here in Washington and we look forward to working with UNRWA USA on future such events.

- Elizabeth Campbell, Director, UNRWA Representative Office of Washington



UNRWA alumni and relay runners met with Rep. Rashida Tlaib, the first Palestinian-American woman to serve in the US Congress.

## how to take action

**01** educate yourself on unrwa, unrwa usa, and palestine refugees

**02** contact your congressional rep and tell them that you want your tax dollars to fund unrwa

**03** donate or fundraise to support unrwa programs like food assistance, education, and mental health.



*<< hear unrwa student parliamentarians share their message to the american public and the us government*

# UNRWA ALUMNI OF NORTH AMERICA

## unrwa alum feature: q+a with mohammed eid

**What does being an UNRWA alum mean to you and how has UNRWA changed your life?**

Being a UNRWA alum means that I gain power and control again in my life. It means that I've transitioned from being a refugee deprived from basic human rights to being an empowered refugee advocating, educating, and supporting other refugees, refugees for whom UNRWA might be the only hope in life. UNRWA helped me overcome my struggles as a refugee, and the UNRWA Alumni of North America helps me help others in return.

If you are an UNRWA alum, [join Mohammed and many others as a member of the UNRWA Alumni of North America today!](#)

**Why did you join the alumni association and why do you think we should invest in UNRWA?**

Americans often get surprised when they hear that Palestine refugees are the largest stateless community in the world. Being a refugee often means being deprived of many rights most people take for granted, like clean drinking water, education, physical safety, and legal documentation. Regardless of the politics, UNRWA addresses the humanitarian needs of refugee children, men, women, and the elderly, literally saving and improving lives every single day. UNRWA does not do this work alone, and calls upon Americans to provide their continuous support.

**Please share a memory from either the alumni reunion or advocacy day.**

On September 26, I toured Capitol Hill with fellow alum and American supporters. I was filled with happiness knowing that US representatives and lawmakers were willing to meet with and listen to Palestine refugees. This was unimaginable to me a few years ago, when I was surviving repeated military attacks, violence, and blockade in Gaza. I told every representative I met with my story, so that we can put an end to Palestine refugee suffering and ensure refugees can live the life of dignity that they deserve.



Mohammed Eid shares what it was like to grow up in refugee camp in Gaza, survive multiple Israeli military assaults, and support his fellow refugees through his work at UNRWA and UNRWA USA.

[watch: unrwa alum share what being a palestine refugee means to them](#)

## *celebrating palestine refugees*

**O**n World Refugee Day (June 20), we announced the launch an association of UNRWA Alumni of North America, which is an organized group of people who share the common experience of having attended UNRWA schools, benefited from UNRWA services, and/or served as UNRWA staff and are living in or citizens of the United States or Canada. Through their personal stories and advocacy efforts, members aim to help change the US narrative around Palestine refugees and subsequently generate widespread American support for UNRWA. The inaugural UNRWA alumni reunion was held in September 2019, featuring a rooftop reception in downtown Washington, DC, participation in UNRWA USA's first-ever advocacy day, a private tour of the Library of Congress (including the Middle East Reading Room), a private tour of the newly opened Museum of the Palestinian People with founder Bshara Nassar, and other alumni networking events.



# meet the people behind unrwa usa

If you've ever been to one of our famous Gaza 5Ks, you've likely seen Laila Mokhiber on stage hyping up the crowd, but do you know the woman behind the mic?

Laila joined UNRWA USA in July of 2013 as our Communications Officer and now wears the badge of "longest-serving staff member." In 2016 she took on the role of Director of Communications, but during her tenure she's worn many hats and undertaken a wide range of responsibilities, from digital marketing to managing the mid-level donor portfolio to serving as acting executive director.

The role she's enjoyed most to date has been growing and coaching the 3-woman "comms command center" as we like to call it. In the time since Laila joined UNRWA USA, the organization grew from a staff of 3 to 8, and annual funding from around \$500,000 to \$4+ million, and we're just getting started.

Nicknamed "the connector", Laila has played a significant role in UNRWA USA's growth by leveraging her personal brand and love of community for the cause. She has an endless curiosity and drive to learn, innovate, and build. In November 2020, the Arab American Foundation awarded her the designation of one of the US' top 40 leaders under 40.

**staff feature:**  
**laila mokhiber,**  
**director of**  
**communications**

Laila was honored to receive this award and to be recognized by the Arab American community she proudly hails from for her many years of service and achievements.

Prior to joining UNRWA USA, Laila spent three years managing the communications and outreach efforts for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC). Her current role, and the role she played at ADC, illustrate Laila's passions: humanitarian concern for the people of Palestine and the fight for social justice.

Laila's aim and vision are to challenge negative or misinformed narratives and positively shape how Americans think and talk about the context surrounding the plight of Palestine refugees. In her years with UNRWA USA Laila has had the rare privilege to access places like the Gaza Strip where she meets both the refugees providing

and receiving the Agency's protection and assistance. She feels a duty and calling to bring to the consciousness of the American mainstream the plight of Palestine refugees.

What drives her work at UNRWA USA is the idea that by lifting up the heroic stories and voices of Palestine refugees, more American hearts and minds will be won for our mission. It was this notion that led her to envision the Relay Run for Refugees and our first-ever Advocacy Day in 2019.

Laila, like all of us, hopes that Palestine refugees will not hold their refugee status in perpetuity and dreams that a just political solution to their plight will be found. Until that moment comes, Laila will use her power and privilege both as an UNRWA USA employee, and as an American who cares, to advocate for Palestine refugees' dignity and humanitarian rights for all.





# our board

Ghassan Salameh, Chair  
Elias Aburdene  
Karen AbuZayd, former UNRWA Commissioner-General  
Ambassador (ret.) Maura Connelly  
Ambassador (ret.) Ryan Crocker  
Mike Farah\*\*  
Lara Friedman\*  
Ambassador (ret.) Richard W. Murphy  
Imad I. Qasim  
Nadia Saah\*\*  
Shibley Telhami  
Ambassador (ret.) Philip C. Wilcox, Jr., Chair Emeritus

# our staff

Mara Kronenfeld, Executive Director\*  
Laila Mokhiber, Director of Communications  
Lori Mosher, Director of Programs and Operations  
Hani Almadhoun, Director of Philanthropy  
Brett Menge, Director of Finance \*  
Medhini Kumar, Communications Officer  
Harley Dority, Community Engagement Officer  
Venu Thirumala, Development Associate\*

\*Joined in 2020

\*\*To join the board in 2021



2020 staff members are pictured above with the exception of Venu Thirumala. 2019 staff included Abby Smardon as Executive Director and Mohammed Eid as Program Officer.

## honoring abby smardon



Abby Smardon served UNRWA USA for over 11 years, leading the organization as its Executive Director for nearly 9 of those years. It is with a heavy but open heart, we said farewell to Abby in 2019 as she pursued other opportunities in her home state of Ohio.

Over the years, Abby contributed greatly to champion the organization's mission to better the life of Palestine refugees and grow UNRWA USA into the organization we see today. When she joined UNRWA USA, she was fresh out of graduate school and the sole staff member. Young and hungry to make a change, she took an organization with an unclear future and helped grow the staff and increase its annual contributions to UNRWA from a few thousand dollars to over a million dollars per year. Through her leadership and the dedication and generosity of thousands of American supporters, UNRWA USA built strong partnerships and unique initiatives in the past decade, including the Gaza 5K, Gather for Gaza, and an association for UNRWA Alumni of North America. We are profoundly grateful for Abby's commitment to the cause, [years of dedicated service](#), and compassion. We know she will remain a strong advocate and wish her the best on her future professional pursuits and personal ventures.



# our partners

*“We’re proud to partner with UNRWA and to support its strong track record of management, resiliency, and excellence.”*

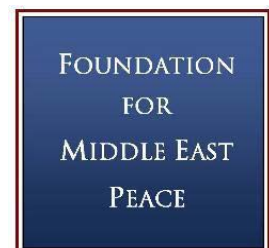
*- Amna Mirza, Head of Marketing and Communications at Zakat Foundation of America (ZFA)*

**To learn how your organization or foundation can make an impact,  
contact Lori Mosher at [lori@unrwausa.org](mailto:lori@unrwausa.org).**

# working together for refugees

We are privileged to work with corporations, foundations, nonprofits, and organizations of all sizes who give generously to support Palestine refugees. Through financial, in-kind donations, and technical contributions our partners provide critical support for UNRWA programs for Palestine refugees in the Middle East and raise awareness about them here in the United States.

## OUR FOUNDATIONAL PARTNERS



# our supporters

*unrwa usa is its supporters, donors, and advocates.*



## donor spotlight: leila richards

"I'd worked as a physician in Gaza, and wanted to bring the ongoing situation in Gaza to wider attention, especially in light of the Trump administration's decision to cut all US funding for UNRWA. With the help of UNRWA USA and volunteers from several organizations in Pittsburgh, we reached out to local peace and justice groups, houses of worship, and the local Arab-American community for support.

Our goals were to raise funds for children's mental health services in Gaza but also to educate participants about the crucial support that UNRWA has provided to Palestine refugee families for 70 years. On the day of the event, more than 100 walkers circled a 4K portion of Schenley Park, near the campus of the University of Pittsburgh, led by the marching band of Taylor Alderdice High School.

We raised more than \$17,000, surpassing our fundraising goal and hope to hold this event again in fall of 2020, adapted to the current COVID-19 restrictions."



## get to know our partner, delawareans for palestinian human rights



“Delawareans for Palestinian Human Rights (DePHR) was established to advocate for Palestinian human rights and has partnered with organizations that seek peace and justice through open communications and collaboration. UNRWA USA consistently leads by example through their outstanding work and is an exemplary partner aligned with all of our efforts. DePHR has been privileged to participate in their programs through hosting fundraisers such as the Gaza Mezze dinner, speakers, and the Refugees Reimagined event as part of the Relay Run for Refugees in 2019. UNRWA USA is a major organization that serves, educates, feeds, and heals in an age of recognizing the plight of marginalized people. UNRWA USA deserves the recognition and support of all institutions and individuals who champion human rights.”

- Mike Abel, DePHR



### olive tree planting in honor of top fundraisers

As a form of gratitude towards donors who went above and beyond via fundraising and/or their contributions to bettering the lives of Palestine refugees, UNRWA USA partnered with Canaan Fair Trade and the Palestinian Fair Trade Association to plant trees in their or a loved one's honor through their Tree for Life program. This program gives thousands of olive trees to farmers starting out, as well as smaller farmers and those whose trees or lands have been destroyed by Israeli forces. Since 2006, the project has planted almost 150,000 trees! In 2019, UNRWA USA staff joined farmers for a planting ceremony in the picturesque Palestinian village of 'Arura in the West Bank (above).

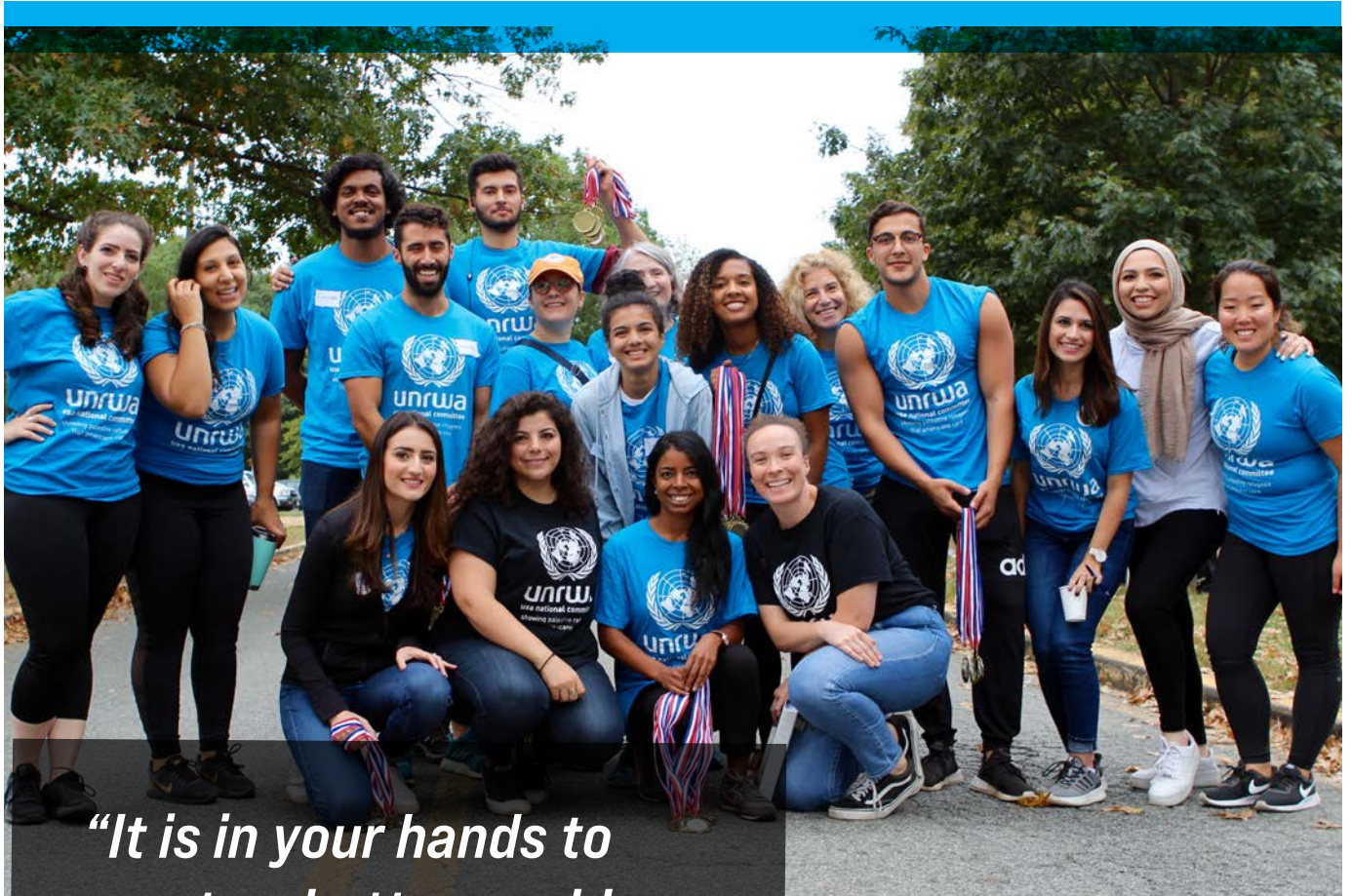


DePHR hosted UNRWA USA's 'Refugees Reimagined' speaking event in Wilmington, DE, where Palestine refugees shared their stories to shift the narrative



# JOIN the MOVEMENT

no act is too  
small to show  
your solidarity  
with palestine  
refugees



*“It is in your hands to  
create a better world  
for those who live in it.”*

*- Nelson Mandela*





## get involved + take action today

### 01 Donate

to provide UNRWA programming to refugees or give monthly as a Solidarity Sustainer

### 02 Fundraise

for UNRWA USA. Engage your community by starting your own online fundraising campaign

### 03 Follow UNRWA USA

to receive educational resources like Voices of UNRWA blog articles and stories and the Let's Talk UNRWA live speaker series

### 04 Advocate

for Palestine refugees and America's investment in UNRWA's work by contacting your member of Congress to let them know you want your tax dollars to fund UNRWA

### 05 Experience or host an event

like our Gaza 5K walk/run and Gather for Gaza events

### 06 Join the UNRWA Alumni of North America

if you attended an UNRWA school, received services, or worked for the Agency for any length of time

### 07 Volunteer

your time to amplify our mission and impact. Virtual options available!

### 08 Educate

yourself and others about Palestine refugees, the history, their story, and UNRWA's work for them

### 09 Create a legacy

by naming UNRWA USA in your will or trust for any amount or a gift of property through UNRWA USA's planned giving program

# finances

*a note from our director of finance*  
*+ a summary of unrwa usa expenses*  
*and how we distribute our funding*  
*to unrwa programs*

Dear UNRWA USA Supporters,

UNRWA USA is committed to achieving the highest standards of accountability and transparency. We are humbled and inspired every day by the support that we receive from our donors and work to ensure that your donations have the maximum impact to promote a life of dignity and human development for Palestine refugees.

As an organization, we are committed to the ethical standards of the Sarbanes-Oxley act. Our complete, audited Financial Statements are included on our website ([unrwausa.org](http://unrwausa.org)) with full disclosure and notes.

UNRWA USA has also provided our 2019 IRS form 990 which is required to maintain our 501c3 status as a registered nonprofit. UNRWA USA is also compliant with Payment Card Industry (PCI) standards and invests in robust internet security to protect the data integrity of our donors and the organization. We maintain our books and records in compliance with Generally Accepted Accounting Practices (GAAP) and are compliant with IRS Form 5500 audit requirements.

Thank you for your enthusiasm and support ensuring that Palestine refugees have the protection and humanitarian assistance necessary to rebuild their lives.



In solidarity,

Brett Menge  
Director of Finance

ADMIN

PROGRAMMING EXP

13%

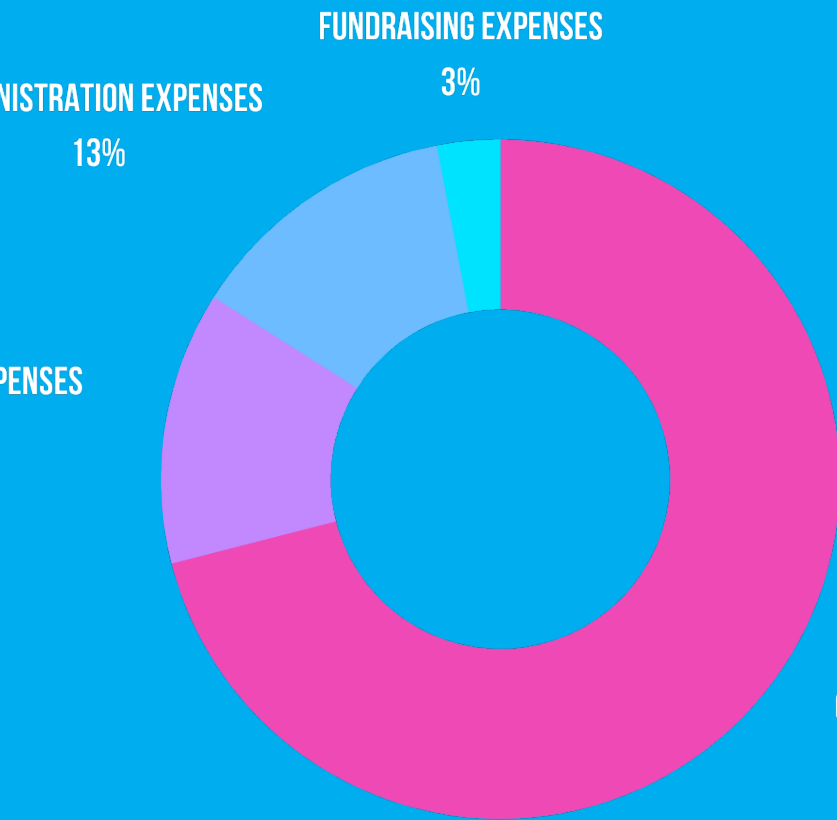
FOOD ASSISTANCE

32.3%

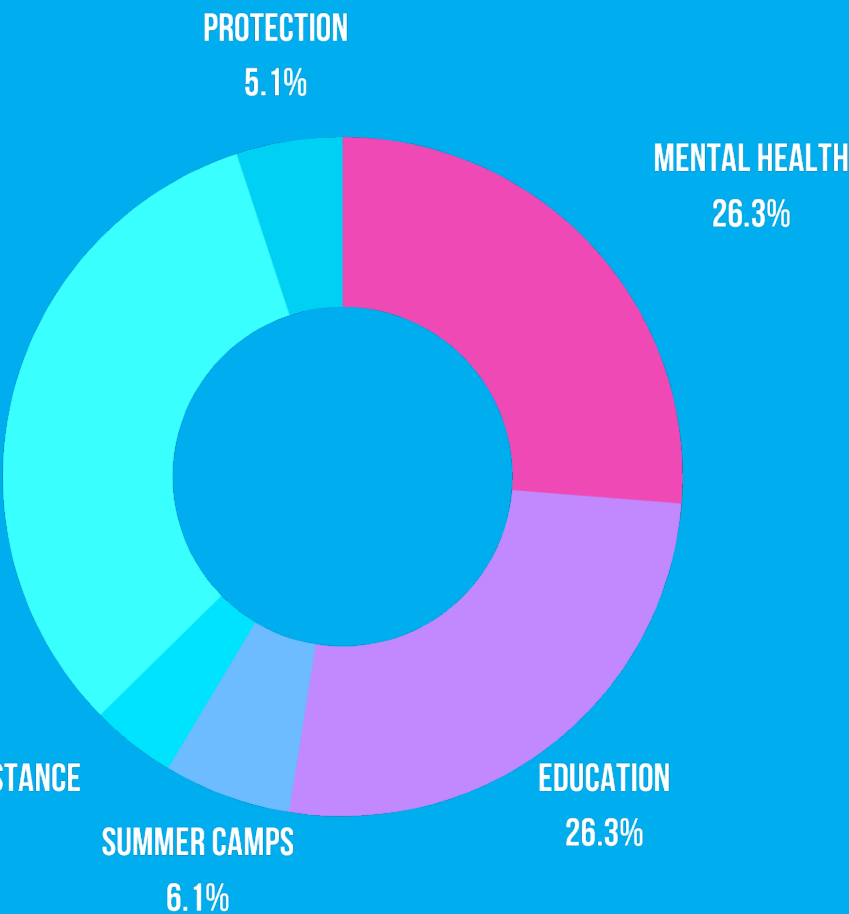
CASH ASSIS

4%





Expense	Amount
Grants to UNRWA	\$2,788,744
Programming Expenses	\$506,50
Administration Expenses	\$493,636
Fundraising Expenses	\$117,618
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,906,500</b>



UNRWA Program	Amount
Mental Health	\$734,500.44
Education	\$735,019.00
Summer Camps	\$175,000.00
Cash Assistance	\$124,138.15
Food Assistance	\$889,148.82
Protection	\$126,437.79
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,788,744</b>