U.N. Palestinian refugee agency decries Swiss move to cut funding  
GENEVA, Dec 13 (Reuters) - The head of the U.N. Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) denounced a move by Switzerland to cut aid as the Gaza Strip faces a humanitarian crisis described as apocalyptic by the United Nations.

Speaking at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva on Wednesday, UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini deplored the agency's "chronic underfunding", a day after he expressed disappointment in the Swiss initiative.

"Despite our successes, UNRWA suffers from chronic underfunding which impacts the quality of our services," he said.

"Upholding refugees' rights is not only the responsibility of humanitarian and development actors, it is a responsibility ... shared with donors and host countries," he added, without mentioning the Swiss move.

Switzerland's National Council, the lower house of the Federal Assembly, approved cutting an annual contribution of 20 million Swiss francs ($22.83 million) to the agency by 116 to 78 votes on Monday. The initiative's author, who was part of a parliamentary delegation that visited UNRWA earlier this year, has argued that the agency lacked objectivity.

The upper house is scheduled to assess the initiative on Thursday. Both houses have to approve for the proposal to be put into effect.

"As a country that leads on international humanitarian law, I am disappointed in this decision to cut aid to the largest and most active humanitarian agency on the ground in Gaza today," Lazzarini wrote on X on Tuesday.

Lazzarini - who said last month he believed there was a [deliberate attempt](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/un-palestinian-agency-gaza-operations-being-deliberately-strangled-2023-11-16/) to strangle UNRWA's operations - said that the agency's capacity to do its work in the Palestinian enclave was on the verge of collapse.

Other U.N. bodies deplored the Swiss move. Filippo Grandi, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, said he hoped Switzerland and other countries would continue funding UNRWA.

"If UNRWA goes away and is not funded, the Palestinians that have already been so tragically penalized by history will be even more penalized," Grandi said.

Weeks of Israeli bombing, in response to a deadly Oct. 7 attack on Israel by Hamas militants, have internally displaced 85% of Gaza's population. More than 130 UNRWA staff have also been killed since the start of the conflict on Oct. 7.

UK bans entry for those responsible for settler violence against Palestinians

LONDON, Dec 14 (Reuters) - British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said on Thursday that those responsible for settler violence against Palestinians would be banned from entering Britain, following a similar plan by the European Union.

U.N. figures show daily settler attacks in the Israeli-occupied West Bank have more than doubled since the Palestinian militant group Hamas's deadly Oct. 7 attack on Israel from Gaza.

"Extremist settlers, by targeting and killing Palestinian civilians, are undermining security and stability for both Israelis and Palestinians," Cameron said on social media site X, formerly known as Twitter.

"Israel must take stronger action to stop settler violence and hold the perpetrators accountable. We are banning those responsible for settler violence from entering the UK to make sure our country cannot be a home for people who commit these intimidating acts."

On Monday, foreign office minister Andrew Mitchell told parliament that Cameron had discussed the issue of travel bans with his U.S. counterpart last week.

While much international attention has focused on the cross-border assault and Israel's subsequent war against Hamas in Gaza, European officials have also expressed increasing concern about rising violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.

Earlier this week European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he would [propose sanctions](https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-ministers-consider-next-steps-response-israel-hamas-war-2023-12-10/) against Jewish settlers responsible for violence against Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Borrell did not say what the sanctions would entail but EU officials have said they would involve bans on travel to the EU.

The settlements are one of the most contentious issues of the decades-long Israel-Palestinian conflict. They are built on land captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East War but which the Palestinians seek for a future independent state. They are deemed illegal by most countries but have consistently expanded over the years