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Trump to target UN rights body and Palestinian relief agency

By **Jeff Mason** and **Michelle Nichols**

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U.S. President Donald Trump speaks to reporters in the Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House in Washington, U.S., January 30, 2025. REUTERS/Elizabeth Frantz [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)

Summary

Trump quit UN rights council, cut UNRWA funding in first term

Trump moves coincide with visit by Israel's Netanyahu

Trump has also quit World Health Organization, climate deal

WASHINGTON, Feb 4 (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump is expected on Tuesday to stop U.S. engagement with the United Nations Human Rights Council and continue a halt to funding for the

U.N. Palestinian relief agency UNRWA, a White House official said on Monday.

The move coincides with a visit to Washington by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has long been critical of UNRWA, accusing the agency of anti-Israel incitement and its staff of being "involved in terrorist activities against Israel."

An UNRWA spokesperson declined to comment on an order that has not yet been issued, describing the agency's financial situation as already "very, very bad".

U.N. Human Rights Council acting spokesperson Pascal Sim said he was unaware of any communication from Washington, but that no formal process existed since the U.S. is not currently a voting member.

During Trump's first term in office, from 2017-2021, he also cut off funding for UNRWA, questioning its value, saying that Palestinians needed to agree to renew peace talks with Israel, and calling for unspecified reforms.

The first Trump administration also quit the 47-member Human Rights Council halfway through a three-year term over what it called chronic bias against Israel and a lack of reform. The U.S. is not currently a member of the Geneva-based body. Under Democratic former President Joe Biden, the U.S. was re-elected and served a 2022-2024 term.

Biden's envoy to the council previously urged Trump to stay active, partly to counter China's "dangerous" influence.

A Human Rights Council working group is due to review the U.S. human rights record later this year, a process all countries undergo every few years. While the council has no legally binding power, its debates carry political weight and criticism can raise global pressure on governments to change course.

Since taking office for a second term on Jan. 20, Trump has ordered that the U.S. withdraw from the World Health Organization and from the Paris climate agreement - also steps he took during his first term in office.

ISRAEL VS UNRWA

Israel's U.N. ambassador, Danny Danon, on Monday praised the expected moves by Trump, accusing the Human Rights Council of "aggressively promoting extreme anti-Semitism."

"At the same time, UNRWA has long lost its status as an independent humanitarian organization, and has turned into a terrorist authority controlled by Hamas under the guise of a humanitarian agency," he said.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said last week that the agency has been the

target of a "fierce disinformation campaign" to "portray the agency as a terrorist organization."

The U.S. was UNRWA's biggest donor - providing \$300 million-\$400 million a year - but Biden paused funding in January 2024 after Israel accused about a dozen UNRWA staff of taking part in the deadly Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel by Palestinian militants Hamas that triggered the war in Gaza.

The U.S. Congress then formally suspended contributions to UNRWA until at least March 2025. UNRWA provides aid, health and education services to millions of Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

The United Nations has said that nine UNRWA staff may have been involved in the Oct. 7, 2023, attack and were fired. A Hamas commander in Lebanon - killed in September by Israel - was also found to have had a UNRWA job. The U.N. has vowed to investigate all accusations made and repeatedly asked Israel for evidence, which it says has not been provided.

An Israeli ban went into effect on Jan. 30 that prohibits UNRWA from operating on its territory or communicating with Israeli authorities. UNRWA has said operations in Gaza and West Bank will also suffer.

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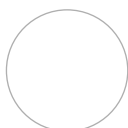
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Jeff Mason is a White House Correspondent for Reuters. He has covered the presidencies of Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden and the presidential campaigns of Biden, Trump, Obama, Hillary Clinton and John McCain. He served as president of the White House Correspondents' Association in 2016-2017, leading the press corps in advocating for press

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