

## Letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Directors of WFP, WHO, and UNICEF

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### To:

Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations  
Ms. Cindy McCain, Executive Director, World Food Programme  
Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization  
Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director, UNICEF

### Subject: Urgent Appeal to Halt the Termination of Palestinian Staff Who Relocated from Gaza

Dear Secretary-General Guterres,

Ms. McCain,

Dr. Ghebreyesus,

Ms. Russell,

I am writing to urgently request your intervention in a critical matter affecting Palestinian staff within the World Food Programme, World Health Organization, and UNICEF. These staff members, who have dedicated years of service to your organizations, have been instructed to return to Gaza amidst a devastating conflict or face termination of their employment.

Twelve staff members from WFP, as well as Palestinian colleagues in WHO and UNICEF, have managed to self-relocate outside Gaza in the face of escalating violence. These individuals personally shouldered the financial burden, each paying \$5,000 from their own funds, with additional costs for dependents, to ensure the safety of their families. Now, living under difficult conditions, they continue to fulfill their responsibilities remotely, demonstrating unwavering commitment despite their circumstances.

In this time of crisis, one would expect humanitarian organizations to extend a protective hand to displaced staff. Instead, however, WFP, WHO, and UNICEF have issued instructions for these employees to return to Gaza by the end of the year if they wish to keep their jobs. This directive, which effectively ends their telecommuting arrangements, is both unrealistic

and dangerous, as Gaza's infrastructure has been devastated, and essential services are scarcely available.

At the same time, over half of the staff in Geneva, a headquarters location classified as "A" (non-hazardous), are permitted to telecommute without restriction. Geneva staff benefit from top-tier medical coverage, salaries of no less than \$8,000 per month for General Service roles, and a secure, supportive work environment. For these Palestinian staff, however, telecommuting seems to be deemed a privilege they do not deserve, even though their lives are at stake.

This decision by WFP, WHO, and UNICEF not only jeopardizes the safety of their Palestinian staff but also contradicts the core principles of humanitarian aid and the duty of care. Recently, WFP informed staff that failure to return to Gaza would result in special leave without pay and non-renewal of contracts upon expiration—an approach that appears designed to bypass paying termination indemnities by allowing contracts to lapse instead.

Furthermore, while Palestinian staff are being asked to risk their safety by returning to Gaza, international staff, often from the Global North, are being recruited to work temporarily at the Rafah border, where there is reportedly limited scope for meaningful contribution. This disparity underscores the urgent need for fair and consistent application of telecommuting policies.

The Palestinian staff affected by these policies have served your organizations with dedication—many for over fifteen years. In light of their unwavering commitment, I urge you to halt these terminations and extend the same protections offered to staff in safer duty stations. A clear, consistent policy of telecommuting that prioritizes staff safety is imperative at this critical juncture.

Mr. Secretary-General, Ms. McCain, Dr. Ghebreyesus, and Ms. Russell, I respectfully call upon you to act decisively in this urgent matter. In a time when the UN's commitment to its core values and the spirit of its Charter is more critical than ever, I am hopeful that a compassionate and just solution will be reached for these valued colleagues. The UN must act decisively to preserve the principles it stands for by protecting those who have given so much in service to its mission.

Yours sincerely,

Nadine Kaddoura  
former United Nations senior staff

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nadine Kaddoura". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.