

Open Letter

To the Executive Directors of UN Women, UNICEF, and UNFPA

Copied to the Deputy Secretary-General and the Secretary-General

Nadine Kaddoura
Founder @CERTIORARIS and former UN Senior Staff
15 September 2025

To:

Ms. Sima Bahous, Secretary-General of the United Nations

cc:

Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina J. Mohammed

Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director, UNICEF

Ms. Diene Keita, Executive Director of UNFPA

Ms. Reem Alsalem UN Special Rapporteur, Violence Against Women and Girls

Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Chef de Cabinet

Mr. Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General

I am writing to alert you that 480 UNRWA women teachers have been unlawfully placed on special leave without pay after having fled under the bombs from Gaza to a safe haven outside the occupied palestinian territories, on their own.

In total, 584 staff have been affected, of which 480 are women.

480 women.

That means more than four out of every five staff punished by this measure are women.

A shocking 82 per cent.

This level of disproportionate harm to women constitutes a glaring violation of women's rights and requires immediate corrective measures and urgent redress, consistent with the mandates of your offices.

These women fled Gaza alone, with no support, under conditions of extreme hardship. Many had lost family members, seen their homes destroyed, and were left without access to basic healthcare or food to care for their children or themselves. Neither UNRWA nor any other agency offered them safe shelter, not even a tent.

Not even a tent.

With no protection, they had no choice but to seek safety and urgent medical care on their own.

They continued to work remotely from Egypt, fulfilling their duties despite everything. Yet the Commissioner-General decided unlawfully to place them on exceptional leave without pay for a full year.

The testimonies of these UNRWA women are unbearable. Some are now forced to clean homes in Egypt just to provide food to their children. Women in conflict and displacement, when stripped of income and social protection, face heightened risks of violence, including sexual violence and exploitation. Displacement, combined with economic insecurity, deepens their vulnerability. Women who cannot provide for their children are more easily coerced, more likely to be subjected to abuse in exchange for the bare necessities of survival. Refugee women denied access to jobs or financial services are left even more exposed, more susceptible to violence, abuse, and exploitation. Economic empowerment in such contexts is not simply about income. It is a tool of protection. The provision of salaries, support, and protection services is what now stands between these women and exploitation.

No explanation can soften what you will read next. I leave you to judge for yourself, in their own voices, below.

Testimony 1 – UNRWA Gaza Female Teacher

“After ten years of IVF, I finally had a baby but he was a child with special needs. When the bombing started, I ran with him to Egypt to keep him alive. My husband stayed behind to care for his parents. A few days later, they were all killed, my husband and his parents. Now it is just me and my baby. UNRWA cut my salary, and I cannot pay for kindergarten or for the care my child with special needs requires. I don’t know how I am supposed to manage.”

Testimony 2 – UNRWA Gaza Female Teacher

“My daughter was badly injured and had to go through more than seventeen operations. I brought her out of Gaza on a medical care option so she could be treated, but I had to leave my other children behind. They depend only on me and on my salary. Instead of helping me in this situation, UNRWA put me on unpaid leave for a whole year even though I kept working remotely with full dedication while caring for my daughter in hospital. How am I supposed to feed my other children in Gaza if I don’t even have my salary of 1,000 USD? What should I do? Tell me! What should I do?”

Testimony 3 – UNRWA Gaza Female Teacher

“I fled Gaza with my three children, running from the hell we were living through. When UNRWA cut my salary, I had no choice but to leave my children at home alone while I went to clean apartments for strangers just to bring them something to eat. How can I call this survival? What kind of life is this for me and for my children? Where is my dignity?”

Testimony 4 – UNRWA Gaza Female Teacher

“I left Gaza with my husband so he could receive cancer treatment. Six weeks later, he died. Now my children are still in Gaza, with no one to provide for them. They are living in tents, searching for food, suffering from malnutrition, and needing urgent care. And I have no salary to provide for them. Tell me, how am I supposed to keep them alive from here?”

In addition to the inherent right to protection and dignity, this decision directly contravenes United Nations General Assembly Resolution 64/290 (2010) on the right to education in emergencies. That resolution, grounded in international human rights and humanitarian law, explicitly recognizes education as *lifesaving* and fundamental during armed conflict. It affirms that education plays a critical role in preventing abuses against affected populations, including sexual violence, exploitation, trafficking, and the worst forms of child labour.

Further, the Incheon Declaration (2015), endorsed by UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, UN Women, and UNFPA, established the global Education 2030 Agenda. Paragraph 25 clearly affirms that “*education in emergency contexts is immediately protective, providing life-saving knowledge and skills and psychosocial support to those affected by crisis.*” It also stresses that education equips children, youth, and adults with the tools to withstand and prevent disaster, conflict, and disease.

Women who once taught children in Gaza now find themselves silenced, cut off from their salaries, and forced into conditions of exploitation simply to feed their families.

I leave you with the image of Ritaj, a young Gazan student, sitting among the rubble with her calculator and notebooks. She went out of her building to find connection and to sit for her exams, despite being displaced and having lost her home. Even in destruction, she carried with her the tools of learning, the last anchor she had.



This picture, besides being a testament to this girl’s courageous determination, is also the clearest proof that education in emergencies is life-saving, it is protective, and it is

dignity itself. To strip women teachers of their salaries in this context is to sever the very lifeline that allows children like Ritaj to hold on to hope.

I ask you, as women leading entities with clear mandates to protect women and safeguard their rights, including the right to education and the rights of children, to take immediate corrective action.

Under your mandates, you hold a direct responsibility to these Gazan women and their children. Failure to intervene and redress this situation would constitute not only a breach of that responsibility but also a denial of the protection your offices are obliged to uphold.

I urge you to exert all necessary pressure to rescind this unlawful decision and to restore the rights and entitlements of the UNRWA women affected by this unlawful decision.

Nadine Kaddoura
Founder CERTIORARIS; and;
former United Nations senior staff

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nadine Kaddoura". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nadine" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Kaddoura". The signature is positioned on a light-colored, slightly textured background.