

## Open Letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations

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Founder @CERTIORARIS and former UN Senior Staff  
11 September 2025

**To:**

Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations

**cc:**

Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner General of UNRWA

Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Chef de Cabinet

Mr. Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General

**Subject: Urgent Call for Action - Unlawful Withholding of Salaries from 625 UNRWA Palestinian Staff**

*"I am one of your UNRWA staff. I fled Gaza nine months pregnant, starving, my body breaking down from malnutrition and high blood pressure. Doctors warned me I might be cut open without anesthesia. I begged for help, sent my medical reports, and escaped in maternity clothes. The border closed behind me.*

*I borrowed money I did not have, just to pay the bribes they call coordination fees. I dragged my five children with me and left my husband behind. After the invasion of Rafah, he vanished. No voice, no trace. I am now alone with five children, the eldest only nine, the youngest barely one year old.*

*Six months without pay. Six months begging, borrowing, breaking down. The bank wants its money. My children want their father. They want food. And I have nothing left to give.*

*So tell me, what exactly are you waiting for? For me to burn myself alive in front of the world so you can finally see that your silence is sentencing me and my children to death?"*

— **Testimony by Ola Ziada, English Second Language Teacher at UNRWA**

*"My house was destroyed. My mother, my wife, my four children all martyred. I alone was left breathing. I crawled from the north of Gaza to the south, running from death until I finally escaped the Strip.*

*And what was my reward for surviving? My salary was cut. My lifeline taken. Tell me: what kind of justice is this? What kind of employer buries the dead in silence and punishes the survivor for daring to breathe?"*

— **Testimony of an UNRWA Teacher in Gaza**

*"I gave UNRWA twenty years of my life as a teacher. And when I fled under the bombs with nothing, UNRWA decided to cut my salary."*

— **Testimony of an UNRWA Teacher in Gaza**

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**Dear Mr. Secretary-General,**

Six months ago, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, chose to use his so-called “discretionary power” to punish 625 Palestinian staff members in the education sector. Six hundred and twenty-five teachers and educators, people who escaped from the Israeli war machine in Gaza, who fled after their homes were flattened, who buried their families, were cut off from their salaries as if their survival itself were a crime.

The 625 UNRWA staff are not faceless employees.

They Are Teachers: men and women who spent their lives in classrooms, carrying books and chalk, not weapons. They shaped entire generations of Palestinian refugees. If there is anything sacred in this world, it is the legacy of teaching. And yet, their reward for decades of service has been punishment and outright abandonment.

The former Commissioner-General, Pierre Krahenbühl, guided by his lawyers, invented Rule 105.3: an illegal clause that gave him the power to throw staff onto the street without pay whenever he wished. He created it but never dared to use it.

But Mr. Lazzarini did. He pulled it out of the drawer and wielded it as a weapon. With a single stroke, he turned a dormant clause into a blunt instrument of collective punishment against the very people who kept this agency alive.

Mr. Lazzarini already showed his true face when he ordered the evacuation of international staff at the outbreak of war, abandoning Palestinian staff to bombs, bullets, and starvation, without protection, without directives, without support. And when some of those staff somehow crawled out of Gaza alive, the Commissioner-General decided to impose on them further punishment by cutting their salaries outright, leaving them, their babies, their mothers, and their families to fend for themselves, while he continues to collect his lavish salary, presiding over their suffering with cold indifference.

We have not forgotten and we will not stop demanding accountability for Mr. Lazzarini’s refusal to pay death compensation under the Malicious Acts Insurance Policy (MAIP) for more than 550 UNRWA staff killed by Israel. That crime will not be buried, and we will return to it in a separate letter. In the meantime, the families of UNRWA’s martyred staff remain abandoned. Each of them has Provident Fund savings ranging from \$50,000 to \$100,000 of their own money yet not a single dollar has been released. Mr. Lazzarini hides behind invented “legal impediments” to rob the dead of their dignity and the living of their survival.

But there was apparently no “legal impediment” when he chose to dig up and weaponize Rule 105.3: a rule that trampled every humanitarian principle by depriving 625 Palestinian staff, and more than 5,000 of their family members, of their meager salaries. With one stroke of his pen, he condemned them to hunger, sickness, and despair, all while he shields himself behind empty legal jargon and continues to draw his own lavish pay.

Mr. Lazzarini goes from one TV news channel to another, preaching about Israel blocking aid while he himself is blocking and inflicting more suffering on his own staff. What moral authority does UNRWA claim when it starves its own staff, its teachers, of the most basic right to a salary?

While Gaza's people are subjected to forced famine and genocide, Mr. Lazzarini adds to their torment, driving sickness and death into the lives of the very staff who carried this agency for decades.

**Mr. Secretary-General,**

You cannot wash your hands of this. The bloodless cruelty of this policy flows upwards, and your silence makes you complicit.

There is no excuse that justifies withholding the salaries of 625 Palestinian staff. You have the power, today, to reverse this unlawful and unjust decision.

Every day you allow this to continue, you stand shoulder to shoulder with Lazzarini in the deliberate starvation and humiliation of Palestinian teachers and their families. You are complicit in their suffering and you will bear responsibility for whatever further consequences befall them.

All titles, salaries, and privileges can be stripped away. What cannot be taken from you is the moral courage to act when it matters most, unless you choose not to use it.

*"You only truly possess that which you cannot lose in a shipwreck."*

— Abu Hamed al-Ghazali

Respectfully,

Nadine Kaddoura  
Founder CERTIORARIS; and;  
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.