

## **Spain labels the UNRWA indispensable as Caritas Australia reflects on the humanitarian impact.**

In recent days, major Western powers have suspended funding for the UNRWA following allegations against a handful of employees. The UNRWA has around [13,000](#) staff working in Gaza across eight refugee camps, 22 health centres, and 274 schools. It delivers education, health and mental healthcare, relief and social services, microcredit, and emergency assistance to hundreds of thousands of refugees.

**Damian Spruce, Director of Advocacy at Caritas Australia** said of the decision, “In any other circumstance the defunding of an organisation involved in the vital protection of innocent people because of the wrongdoing of a handful of people would be seen as heavy handed and disproportionate. If it were services being deployed to safeguard innocent people here in Australia, from our hospitals to the SES and our lifeguarding services, total withdrawal of funding would be met with warranted outrage. We would rightly expect that the individuals would be dealt with, and services would continue.”

Spain has since vowed to maintain support, with Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares declaring the support of the UN agency to be indispensable in helping to “alleviate the terrible humanitarian situation in Gaza.”

**Sally Thomas, Humanitarian Emergencies Lead at Caritas Australia** [said](#) of the situation, “We are already falling short of addressing short-term needs, which include shelter, food, medicine, and clean water, let alone long-term needs. Without adequate aid funding the humanitarian crisis will escalate, and more suffering could bring more tension to the Middle East as countries outside of Israel and Gaza react. Conversely, properly administered humanitarian aid that sees innocent civilians safeguarded can play a vital role in de-escalating conflict.”

**Damian Spruce** also reflected on the vital role of the UNRWA, stating that, “The UNRWA goes beyond any service that we rely on domestically. It is vital to the survival of the Palestinian people, with 80 percent of the population reliant on international aid before October last year. The organisation is also the largest employer in Gaza. In turn, defunding the UNRWA is a catastrophic blow as it undermines aid and employment.”

The allegations are levelled at around a dozen employees, out of some 30,000 UNRWA workers. The decision to suspend funding has been criticised within the media as amounting to international governments engaging in the collective punishment of innocent civilians.

“International powers should not be acting in a way that increases the suffering of the innocent, which defunding the UNRWA will undoubtedly do. Instead, the global community should be engaged in supporting lasting, peaceful solutions. If peace can be sought, global powers will also be instrumental in rebuilding, and without aid and employment opportunities Gaza is not going to be made liveable again any time soon” concluded **Damian Spruce**.

To support Caritas Australia’s Gaza Appeal, visit [www.caritas.org.au/gaza](http://www.caritas.org.au/gaza) or call 1800 024 413 toll free.

**ENDS**

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