OFFICIAL STATEMENT

Gaza Neutrality Issue

Statement by Christopher Gunness, UNRWA Spokesperson

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East Jerusalem

Allegations have been circulating in conventional and social media networks about an UNRWA staff member being elected to political office in Gaza.

As soon as the allegations came to UNRWA's attention, the Agency undertook a preliminary investigation, including discussing the allegations with the staff member. Based on the due diligence carried out by the Agency to date, UNRWA has neither uncovered nor received evidence to contradict the staff member's denial that he was elected to political office.

Sohail Al-Hindi has rejected the news about his name appearing amongst the winning list of the Hamas political bureau in Gaza, saying: "I have no relation whatsoever with the issue".

In a deliberate and systematic way, UNRWA is tackling neutrality head on. All UNRWA staff are obligated to uphold the highest standards in terms of neutrality, independence and integrity in fulfilling the Agency's mandate to provide services to Palestine refugees. These obligations and standards are established through the Area and International Staff Regulations and Rules.

Staff members are prohibited from engaging in any political activity which is inconsistent or might adversely reflect upon the independence and impartiality required by their status.

All UNRWA staff are regularly advised that holding of political party offices, membership on any political committee, acceptance or solicitation of any financial contributions for political purposes, initiation or signature of petitions involving political candidates or political issues, are all examples of what is regarded as improper conduct for Agency staff.

If any new allegations come to light, we will look into them immediately and thoroughly.

There is more information about the range of activities we undertake to promote neutrality in relation to staff, installations, suppliers and beneficiaries at this link: https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2011033075942.pdf

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