

# EVAP Ep. 33 Jonathan Fowler

Mon, Jun 03, 2024 1:32PM 46:53

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

gaza strip, people, gaza, staff, kinds, west bank, humanitarian crisis, operations, faced, means, aid, un agencies, rafah, funding, region, happening, philippe, donor countries, issue, years

## SPEAKERS

Jonathan Fowler, Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall

---



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 00:12

Welcome to Expert Voices on Atrocity Prevention by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. I'm Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Research Director at the Global Centre. This podcast features one-on-one conversations with practitioners from the fields of human rights, conflict prevention, and atrocity prevention. These conversations will give us a glimpse of the personal and professional side of how practitioners approach human rights protection and atrocity prevention, allowing us to explore challenges, identify best practices, and share lessons learned on how we can protect populations more effectively. Today, I'm speaking with Jonathan Fowler, spokesperson for the UN Relief Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees. As the situation in Gaza continues to rapidly evolve, we think it's important to note from the start that this interview is being recorded on Wednesday, the 8th of May 2024. Thank you for joining us today, Jonathan.



Jonathan Fowler 01:06

It's a pleasure. Thank you very much for having me here today.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 01:09

It's been over half a year since the horrific attacks on 7 October and the start of Israel's attack on Gaza, which has been characterized by relentless bombardments, widespread destruction, and seize tactics that have deprived over 2 million people of life-saving aid and services. Can you describe the humanitarian situation on the ground right now in Gaza and what Palestinians there are enduring?



Jonathan Fowler 01:32

Yes, see, I mean, it's difficult to find words to describe the unprecedented level of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. I mean, we are, we're in the worst humanitarian crisis seen in this region in decades in terms of the number of people affected, the speed of the onset of the

humanitarian crisis and the kinds of things we're seeing. I want to point particularly to the looming famine in the Gaza Strip. You know, we've been ringing the alarm for some time. The IPC classification on famine, which is not, you know, they won't use the term "looming famine" lightly, they have said, you know, that famine like conditions, pockets of it, sort of, you know, coalescing from the north to other parts of the Gaza Strip, is a huge problem. And the issue is that this is entirely manmade, there is no reason to have a famine of this nature. In terms of the number of people affected and at risk, it's the biggest in the world currently. And this is simply because there's not enough aid able to flow in to meet the needs, the basic survival needs of people in the Gaza Strip. You know, you're talking about 2.2, 2.3 million people in the north of the Gaza Strip, which has been the epicenter of the famine-like conditions: severe malnutrition, you know, people dying, lack of food and water. And there are around 300,000 people stuck in that area with completely insufficient and totally erratic aid supply. Now, that's just one aspect of the humanitarian crisis, of course, because what we're looking at when we're, as we're recording today is the prospect of a full scale offensive in Rafah. Now, let's not forget that Rafah, the population of Rafah currently in the southern Gaza Strip is around 1.4 million people. Before the start of the war, it was six times less so, you know, the number of people who have been displaced from other parts of the Gaza Strip and often displaced repeatedly, have gradually been pushed into Rafah, and the coping mechanisms that people have, of course, each time they're displaced gradually get reduced because of what they can carry with them what they're able to access. But we're looking at the prospect of an even worse situation than we currently face. So this is a, this is a war of superlatives. This is a humanitarian crisis of superlatives. And we are, every time, you know, it just gets worse and worse, in terms of the number of dead, the number of injured, you know, we have statistics like 10 children a day are losing limbs, half approximately, or 70%, in fact, of the killed and injured are women and children, 35,000 people dead, approximately, 78,000 injured. This kind of data is shocking. And this is why we're advocating for a ceasefire and we have been for since the beginning of the war.

**J** Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 04:39

And it's so important that you've emphasized that this is a manmade humanitarian crisis. Can you describe the general access challenges faced by humanitarian organizations in Gaza?

**J** Jonathan Fowler 04:51

Yes, absolutely. There are two key issues here. One is to get stuff into the Gaza Strip and that is inconsistent. But, you know, the, kind of, the benchmark that we use for what is needed to meet the basic survival needs of the population of the Gaza Strip is 500 trucks a day. Now, we're not in, again, a game of truck counting here or anything like that, but that's just to give you a sense of, you know, what the minimum requirement is. Now, you know, the number of trucks on average getting in per day comes and goes over time depending on the circumstances, but, you know, April, which was, was a good month, relatively speaking, the average was around 190 a day. 190 does not equal 500 mathematically, of course. In the first few days of of May, you know, the average has risen to about 250. So, that's still half the number of trucks that we need to get in. Now of course, with the latest situation with, with the closure of crossings, the two crossings at Rafah and Kerem Shalom, that potentially means, you know, that the aid pipeline is shut off completely. When will it reopen? Will it reopen at a sufficient level? You know, will it just be a handful of trucks? There are other entry points, for

example, in the north of the Gaza Strip, although we're not involved in that as UNRWA, because we've been denied access to the north of the Gaza Strip. So that's one issue, what can we get in? Now, another example is that the main, basically the only entry point for fuel into the Gaza Strip is the Rafah Crossing. So closure of the Rafah Crossing means an end to the fuel getting in. Now, this was a huge problem earlier in the war, then it improved. But currently, it's extremely difficult again. You know, we are almost running on empty in terms of the aid operation, fuel-wise. We don't have some huge stocks of fuel. It's basically hand-to-mouth when it comes to fuel. Fuel is needed to move goods, humanitarian aid around the Gaza Strip. So basically, you know, fuel for vehicles. But fuel is also necessary to run generators, you know, for electricity to power, power clinics, to power sewage pumping systems, water purification systems, all these kinds of things which are essential for human health. So that's another issue. Now, we are basically also facing the challenge of moving supplies in, into and around the Gaza Strip. Now this is this has been a huge problem. Ever since the beginning of the war. Of course, access to all areas of the Gaza Strip has not been possible, and yet people who are in need are across, across the Gaza Strip. We are, as UNRWA, we are not able to, we haven't been allowed by the Israeli authorities to carry out any delivery or assessment missions to the north since the end of March. And it's also been extremely difficult for other UN agencies. And then we face, in addition to denial of delivery and assessment missions, needs assessment missions. We've also faced the the general impact of the breakdown in law and order in the Gaza Strip, which has been seen since the beginning of the war. And it's just got worse and worse, meaning that our drivers are at risk. Some people classify, you know, what happens to convoys as looting. It's more a reflection of the fact that desperate people taking desperate measures, we've seen cases of people jumping convoys and taking food and eating it on the spot. And, of course, what this means is it's hugely disruptive to humanitarian operations overall, because, you know, there's a slogan used in the UN, often, you know: leave no one behind. But I mean, this is, this is really where the rubber hits the road, basically, when it comes to the humanitarian operations. You know, we are supposed to leave no one behind. If we're not able to do our distributions properly, then that means that we're always at risk of leaving the more vulnerable members of the community behind and they're not getting what they need to eat. That's hugely problematic. So you know, we're facing that general environment within the Gaza Strip. Then you have of course the rubble, the debris across the Gaza Strip, it's harder for larger trucks to move around. It's dangerous because of unexploded ordnance. All these kinds of things which you see in in humanitarian crises and in conflict zones in other parts of the world, it's, kind of, levels of multiples in the Gaza Strip and so this is why the operation is not at the level required to meet the needs of the population.

**J** Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 09:53

You know, given this context and all the challenges you face, what makes UNRWA so uniquely placed to, you know, within these limited capacities deliver humanitarian aid across Gaza?

**J** Jonathan Fowler 10:07

Yes, thank you. That's a very important question. I mean, the bottom line is we have the largest footprint of any UN agency in the Gaza Strip. Now this is for, for reasons of the mandate of UNRWA, which has been our mandate since we were created nearly 75 years ago in response to the Palestine refugee crisis. The mandate is almost a sort of provide-public-service-type operations. So, you know, when, you know, running the sewage plants, water purification,

delivering education, and health care. Now we do this not just in the Gaza Strip, we also do this in the West Bank, we do it in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, always serving the Palestine refugee population. So that means we have 13,000 staff in Gaza. Now, the overwhelming majority of them are displaced. The most of them are working in the education sector. But of course, our schooling stopped in October, because our schools were transformed into emergency shelters for the population. But of those 13,000, around 3500 to 4000 of our staff are able to continue working. Now in many cases these are the people that you might imagine more than sort of classic humanitarian, you know, health roles, these kinds of things. So people, sort of, working to, to ensure you know, human health, sanitation, people, this kind of stuff, but we've also had colleagues who are working in other sectors of our work and they have pivoted to do different things as a result, they've stepped up. Now, we have the largest footprint, that's what makes us best placed, because we have the logistical network, we have the distribution network, all other parts of the the UN system and many NGOs rely on our, our network to do their work. So you know, we are an essential part of the picture, we've repeatedly been described by the UN Secretary General and other senior UN officials as the backbone of the aid operation in Gaza, and that is absolutely not an exaggeration. Now, tragically, 188 of our staff to date have been killed in the Gaza Strip. A number of them in the line of duty. For example, one of our warehouses in Rafah was hit in an airstrike, one staff member was killed and other was fatally injured. Many of the other staff who've been killed have been killed along with their families on the basis that, you know, we are, our staff in Gaza are a part of the population, the overwhelming majority are Palestine refugees themselves. So that means a very particular staff profile that gives us the largest footprint, but it also gives us the largest vulnerability of any any UN agency, and that's starkly illustrated by the death toll. And I just want to stress also that the the death toll for UN employees in the Gaza Strip is unprecedented in the history of the United Nations. You know, we've seen tragedies of all kinds over the years in, for the UN, with civilian staff, peacekeepers and others, you know, being killed in in various settings. But nowhere in the world and nowhere in the history of the UN have we seen this many UN staff being killed.

**J** Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 13:33

It's truly tragic and horrific, what's happening. And I can remember, you know, having followed many peacekeeping missions through the years, I can remember when kind of the mission in Mali was, you know, the most dangerous operating environment for UN employees and it just pales in comparison to what's happening right now. You reference the educational role that UNRWA has played. And, you know, beyond the context of the current crisis, where you're very much in the news on a daily basis because you're the backbone of aid, what is UNRWA's, sort of, historical importance in Gaza and across occupied Palestine?

**J** Jonathan Fowler 14:25

Thank you. This is a very important question. I mean, our role, as I mentioned, is to provide kind of public service delivery, primarily. So yes, we pivot into being more of a humanitarian agency in such situations. You know, we've done the same in previous escalations in the Gaza Strip we have ongoing, we have ongoing violence in the West Bank, which means that we also have to pivot into a more humanitarian role. But I mean, just to give you some data, overall. So the registered Palestine refugee population in the in this region is 5.9 million people, now, the largest being in Jordan, that's 2.4 million. But you know, we are working with with that community across the region. We deliver, the majority of our services are delivered in camps.

We don't run the camps ourselves, but we deliver services in them. So you know, for example, if you go to Bethlehem, you go to Aida Camp in Bethlehem, you have the UNRWA clinic, you have the UNRWA schools. Same story in Far'a Camp outside of Nablus. We have 58 of these camps that we're working in. Now, we have more than 600 schools, which means that across the region, we're educating over 543,000 students and we have close to 20,000 staff doing that. Now, of course, the Gaza Strip, no education is happening currently, and this is a big issue, because children have lost a year of education, the psychological damage and the human development damage thereof, and these kids have a right to go to school. We hope, sincerely, that a ceasefire will happen immediately, and that our kids will be able to return to their schools as, as of next fall. Now on the health side, we have, across the region, we have about 3000 staff, you know, and the quality of primary health services is highly rated. We have 140 services, health centers, across the region. And we're able to cater for around 8 million annual patient visits, you know, antenatal care, these kinds of things. Now, one more thing I wanted to mention in terms of the data on what we do is that we, you know, in terms of allowing refugees, enabling refugees to live with as much dignity as possible, we have, we've pivoted to doing cash assistance, as well as food food delivery. Now, this is less of an issue currently in the Gaza Strip. But in Gaza before before the war, we had approximately 1.1 million people who were receiving UNRWA emergency food and cash assistance, cash, of course, allowing people to to make their own choices in terms of what they want to spend that on, and that's emergency assistance. Syria and other example, over there, we have close to 420,000, Palestine refugees, of course, years and years of conflict there, and who need UNRWA assistance, food and cash, to survive. Smaller, smaller number in the West Bank of just over 60,000. But of course, these statistics do vary depending on the situation. And we also provide social protection services and microfinance loans to empower businesses. Last year, we were on microfinance loans across the region were valued at over 31 million US dollars. And this enables people to become entrepreneurs, you know, set up their own businesses and actually helping people to help themselves. So I mean, that's a sort of snapshot of what we're doing, overall as an agency, beyond the pure humanitarian, as it were, but of course, it is, as I stressed in times of escalations in conflict, war time we pivot to this more humanitarian delivery type type role.

**J** Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 18:41

It's really incredible. And I think it's, you know, it's important, you know, the way you emphasize giving people the capacity to live with the most dignity as possible, and kind of allowing them to be entrepreneurs, because I think, you know, a lot of people still have that traditional kind of mindset of refugees, or someone who just fled, you know, a recent conflict, are temporarily displaced and will eventually go back home. And these are people who have been refugees for, you know, in some cases, generations, but many, many years, without, you know, real clear prospects for return, and so giving them the capacity to make their own choices is really important. Earlier, you said that, with the fuel and other humanitarian aid limitations, you're sort of running on fumes living hand-to-mouth. Beyond kind of the resource limitations that come with all of these humanitarian obstacles. I know UNRWA faces other challenges. In February, the Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini sent a letter to the President of the General Assembly, outlining the existential challenges currently faced by the Agency, including ones related to funding and ones imposed by politicized disinformation campaigns. Can you explain some of these challenges that UNRWA faces right now and the reasons behind them.

J Jonathan Fowler 20:04

Yes, absolutely. This is an extremely important issue because we are as Philippe Lazzarini, our Commissioner General, has put it, I mean, we've been subjected to an insidious campaign against the Agency in attempt to dismantle us. Because, I mean, obviously, we're not in the heads of our detractors, but our sense is, you know, from their public statements and sort of ongoing campaigns we've faced over the years that, for them, UNRWA is seen as part of the problem, not part of the solution. Whereas we have a mandate from the General Assembly, which has been repeatedly renewed, to do a job of work, provide kinds of services until such time as there is a just and lasting solution. Now, our detractors would probably argue, because they perceive us as part of the problem, but remove us from the picture, you remove the Palestine refugee status from the refugees. And well, hey, problem solved. But actually, that's not how it works at all. You know, the international community has made solid statements about the fact that we need to continue, to continue our work. That hasn't, of course, stopped the various kinds of campaigns against us. Now, you know, this ranges from the most egregious examples, which is the targeting of our installations in Gaza, the killing of our staff. We've had an... I want to emphasize something I didn't mention before. We've had multiple cases of our staff being detained in the Gaza Strip, subjected to torture-like treatment, to, you know, interrogation techniques to extract information about alleged actions of UNRWA staff, you know, building this kind of sort of mesh of, of disinformation, to basically rhetorically attack the Agency. And this is, this isn't new. I mean, we've seen this in the past over the years, it's just that it's reached kind of fever pitch amid the war in Gaza, through actions, so, you know, targeting of buildings under the UN flag, which is supposed to be protected under international humanitarian law. And we've had more than 400 people killed in our installations, having sought shelter there, and you know, 1400 injured at least, people who sought safety under the blue flag of the UN. But as Philippe Lazzarini flagged the President of the UN General Assembly, you know, these kinds of, sort of, these are all part of a wider picture. I mean, for example, yes, we've had protesters outside our compound in East Jerusalem. We've had legal attempts to prove that somehow we're not entitled to rent this space in East Jerusalem - which to the international community is considered an occupied territory - and we lease it from the Government of Jordan. The...we have been doing that since 1952, in fact, but we've had protests organized by the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem. So we're talking about political decisions that have been made, which the level, the sharpness, of those protests, which irregular weekly protests outside our gates have been increasing. So we've had, you know, they began with people rallying, you know, shouting slogans, and, you know, we're great believers in freedom of expression. But gradually, what's happened is this has moved into behavior, with people coming kind of organizing happenings, I would say, you know, with, with toy guns, this kind of thing. And I want to emphasize, you know, it's not normal for people to walk around Jerusalem with toy guns, if people from the other community in this city... the consequences are very, very stark. We've had people waving, you know, fake weapons at our staff. But yesterday, this reached a new level, where we had a largely young crowd, but accompanied by some armed individuals who were not from the security forces at our gate, smashing the outside installations, hurling stones over the gate, you know, trying to hit our roofs and everything. And we've had, this has been happening more and more. Now, under various diplomatic conventions, UN facilities or like embassies, you know, they are meant to have the same kind of privileges and immunities and protections from the local authorities that will be afforded to any diplomatic installation. And that's not of the case here. You know, and we see this as a campaign of intimidation against us and against our staff in East Jerusalem. Other aspects of this have included the fact that our staff from the West Bank are not able, they're not permitted, to cross into East Jerusalem to do their work. So we've been put into this almost COVID-like situation of staff having to work from home. Okay, we're capable of dealing

with it in the sense, but it's not right. Staff shouldn't have to be doing this. We've had, in the West Bank, we've had issues of intimidation of our staff. Personally, having been on in a car driving to visit one of our installations in Nablus, in the northern part of the West Bank, I got turned back at a checkpoint by a soldier who pointed a gun at our vehicle, on a road which we are totally entitled to us as the United Nations. So, you know, these issues, you know, this sort of stuff comes together. Now, in that case of the checkpoint, we filed a complaint after the event by the Foreign Ministry, you know, but we had to kind of find a workaround, substantial delay to our work. Now what I was doing there was I was visiting a project in Far'a Camp, just outside of Nablus, where one of the Spanish regional governments had 60,000 euro project, so not a huge project. But an important project to rehabilitate the sewage system. Basically, the sewage system in the camp was old, needed repairing to ensure, you know, the human health and stuff, and better living conditions for people in in that camp. And one day bulldozers came in and just dug up the pipes that had already been laid. But they also smashed the pipes that were waiting to be laid. So there we go. I mean, you know, it sounds flippant to say, but that literally is money down the drain. So that's donor money, which has just gone like that, you know, in the blink of an eye, just for an incursion in the camps. Now we see movement restrictions for our staff within the West Bank. So for example, say a teacher who might live in Ramallah and works in a school in Bethlehem can no longer go to work. So what we've had to do is reorganize ourselves. But we are capable of reorganizing ourselves, of course, but that's meant that we have had to deploy different people in different places, so we're not able to operate in the way that we should be able to. The camps where we work, I mentioned have faced, you know, increasing numbers and intensities of incursions. There's deadly violence. We've also had the issue of, you know, facilities damaged in the West Bank. And as I said, staff threatened. Now, you know, my own experience of checkpoints, of course, pales compared to what happens to to local colleagues, who formed the majority of our staff in the West Bank, but there's that level of fear amongst the staff. Of course, this isn't the first time that they've seen this kind of thing so when I speak with my Palestinian colleagues, they're sometimes very philosophical about this. But that doesn't make it any more acceptable. One, I mean, a couple of other examples of the measures that that Philippe Lazzarini has cited, we don't receive the kind of visas for international staff that we are supposed to as the UN. Normally, you know, you receive a 12 month visa. You're supposed to do your work, a bit of visibility on who's going to be where and what so that we can deploy the staff that are needed. But in my own personal case, and this is very common for international staff, having started in this region, last year, my own visa now, it took me five months to receive it. And it's a two month visa. And I would say that I'm one of the lucky ones, because some of the colleagues who are working in protection, which of course is, you know, bearing witness to human rights issues, this kind of thing, those colleagues, in some cases, they're getting one month visas. So it's just hard to know, you know, when you're going to receive what, and put, you know, put staff in the right place. Now, of course, none of this compares at all to what our colleagues in Gaza are going through. But the these are part of an overall sort of attempt to make it harder and harder to do our work. We've also faced bank accounts being closed, we've had, we work with Israeli companies, in, you know, I mean, in procurement and for example, like that, you know, unloading in ports. We've had firms that have been told by the authorities, you know, don't work with UNWRA, you know, there'll be consequences for you, you know, what kind of choice does a company have to make in those situations, so we had difficulty unloading supplies in the Port of Ashdod, of course, which is an extremely important entry point for aid. And then issues like our, you know, VAT status, which is normally meant to be exempt to enable the UN agencies to do their work and also get better value for money for donor money. And the freezing of bank accounts, all these kinds of things come together. And then the rhetorical campaign. I mean, you rightly flagged the fact that Philippe Lazzarini mentioned, you know, disinformation. We face this constantly. There are huge numbers of examples, things which are said by senior Israeli officials in the

media. But then, you know, no evidence then suddenly comes, you know, allegations of behavior of staff, these kinds of things... numbers get thrown around, and these numbers become fact. Now, how much traction this kind of stuff gets is another question. And that does vary. But the problem is this has then created this sort of environment where some leading donors decided to make certain choices. In February, in the wake of a number of allegations, you know, against 12 staff members of UNRWA, talking there about 0.04% of our staff, that they were somehow involved in the October 7 attacks on Israel. Now, I want to emphasize that the UNRWA and the rest of the United Nations system has been absolutely vociferous in our condemnation of what happened on the seventh of October, the attacks were abhorrent. We have said that again and again. Regarding allegations of involvement by a dozen staff, there has been little to no evidence provided. And in fact, an internal UN investigation has already exonerated one staff member. Other investigations are ongoing. They are slow because of lack of evidence. And yet, we hear all kinds of things about huge numbers of UNRWA staff supposedly being linked to groups. And on that front, just to, in parenthesis, I want to say there is there are a number of things which are important here to learn to understand. One is there's no mystery about who works for UNRWA. All the names, IDs, roles of our staff, are shared with all the authorities across the region. So all the authorities where we work, and know who our staff are, there's no... nothing hidden at all. So that's specifically the governments of Jordan, Syria, of Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel as the occupying power for the West Bank and Gaza Strip. And that's where we stand, you know, basically, you know, who our staff are, is known. And there is no mystery about that. And yet, we've had all kinds of allegations about supposedl allegations of our staff. And we see this as part of this overall rhetorical attack.

**J** Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 33:24

And what has been the impact of the decision by some member states to suspend funding to UNRWA?

**J** Jonathan Fowler 33:30

This led to an existential crisis really, for the agency. Because all of a sudden, we were looking at our forecast income for our core work across the region, basically beside the way, and this meant that we would not have been able to sustain operations, you would have seen UNRWA operations unravel, we were looking at, basically, the guillotine on operations potentially falling in February already. Operations unraveling across the region, what would that mean? Would that mean, you know, ending our schooling, ending our health work or, you know, if we were able to sort of recover a little bit financially, or find other resources, then maybe, you know, would schooling be reduced numbers of days per week, and would we have fewer medical consultations... we were having to have these kinds of thinking. Now thankfully, you know, member states started returning after the initial flurry of decisions to spend, we had 16 member states who decided to suspend funding, they gradually returned, so you know, Australia, Canada, others kind of decided to lift the Sweden decided to lift their suspensions. So we were gradually pushing the the moment, the tipping point of risk, as it were, down the line. We are now able to sustain operations through to the end of June. And that's still not super visibility, but it's way, way better than what we had before. Now, in terms of the donor countries who have still suspended funding, there are a handful, but not all are countries that actually were giving us money, or had done it in, I mean, that's in a way, it was, or they've not given it on a regular basis, let's put it that way. So, you know, if a country that didn't plan to



give us anything suspends it, that has less impact than what we actually had in terms of forecast income. But currently, of the major donors who still have not lifted their suspensions, as of today, it's still Austria, the United Kingdom, and above all, the United States. Now, the United States, you know, this has varied, depending on administration's, but you know, the United States has been a very strong supporter of our work. This is something not everybody's aware of, but you know, major, major donor, primary donor, second donor has traditionally been Germany, which has come back in two stages, Germany first resumed funding of our operations beyond Gaza, and then announced a couple of weeks ago that they were resuming funding for our Gaza work. But the United States, we have a shortfall still, because of Austria, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. have around \$260 million of what we were expecting in income this year. Now, of that, the United States makes up almost 90%. There's a congressional decision to put a hold on any funding to UNRWA until March 2025. So that's a fact of life, you know, that's something we have to deal with. That means that we are looking for alternative ways for funding. And in a moment, I'll tell you where that has taken us. But we're also, of course, in constant discussion with the countries that continue to suspend funding on what it is that they would need to be able to come back. But the congressional decision means that, at least we know with the United States, where we stand. Now, you know, what kind of workarounds can be found, whether it's, you know, funding to operations, but not via UNRWA, these kinds of things, this is a huge, you know, hugely important issue. But what we've also seen is, you know, in times of crisis, you often see very clearly who your friends are. And a number of countries, I mean, for example, within Europe, you know, the likes of Norway, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland, raised their contributions to us, very, very consistent, strong supporters raised the contributions. We've also seen non-traditional donor countries coming forward. For example, Iraq made a donation of \$25 million, Algeria, 19 million, sorry, 15 million. This is a recent announcement made by Algeria, this was last week, so that's a very, very important sign of solidarity. But I also want to flag something, which Philippe Lazzarini mentioned last week, which is this grand swell of grassroots solidarity that we've seen. Because, you know, there are UN agencies, which, over the years have traditionally depended, you know, more and more on leveraging funding from individual donors, you know, fill out philanthropic donations, these kinds of things. Now, this hasn't been a tradition in UNRWA, but in fact, necessity has meant that we have gone down this track, and we've actually collected an unprecedented sum. It's over \$115 million to date. Coming from a range of donors, you know, from individual, you know, small scale donors, philanthropic donors, you know, foundations in Singapore, for example, or, you know, community efforts in Ghana, I mean, real range of solidarity from around the world. And it's been particularly gratifying to see that some I mean, a substantial amount of the support has come from countries where the government suspended funding to us. So that shows that there may be a disjunct sometimes between government decisions and popular opinion. And I mean, I want, you know, for example, last week, we had a group of artists in Ireland who were auctioning their work to raise funds for UNRWA. And, you know, these kinds of things, these grassroots efforts, so sort of charitable actions... extremely, extremely important. And so in that sense, you know, that kind of momentum, we do strongly hope that it continues, so not only that all traditional donors return, but the new donor countries and individual and philanthropic donors continue that momentum.

**J** Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 40:05

I want to pivot now to what, I think, is probably a very unfair question to ask because I'm sure your answer would have been different two weeks ago when we contacted you for the interview than it is today, and I'm sure it might even be different tomorrow than it is today... but what in your opinion is most urgently needed to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza?

J

Jonathan Fowler 40:33

I mean, a consistent flow of aid is absolutely critical. I mean, you know, the baseline of 500 trucks a day, that that has to be achieved. And that's not enough. You know, I mean, that that's basically minimum. But I mean, we're talking about, you know, the cascading impacts, even when the guns fall silent. And this is the case in, in many zones of conflict around the world, and will be particularly acute in the Gaza Strip, the health impacts, you know, the reconstruction needs, the mine clearing, the general clearing of unexploded ordinance, recovering the bodies of the missing from the rubble, you know, the rebuild operation, that kind of thing, the psychological scars. As Philippe Lazzarini has flagged it recently, you know, we're not talking about PTSD, here, we're talking about CTSD, which is constant traumatic stress disorder. Those kinds of impacts, you know, the loss of education for kids, the bereavement, the kids separated from their families, you know, kids who are orphaned from one or both parents, or all these kinds of things. So what is needed is, not only scale up the ceasefire, scale up the aid operation to meet the level of need required, and move rapidly into recovery. This is the only way. So that, I mean, alleviating the initial suffering, I mean, it's going to be you know, increasing massively the amount of food supply, water supply, shelter materials, because we don't have enough materials for tents, for example, people are living under, you know, plastic tarps, these kinds of things. And all of that, basically, is absolutely critical. And this has to happen overnight. Now, just on this issue, I mean, something, you know, we're frequently asked about this, which is the different ways of delivering aid. And I just want to mention this, because I think it's important, you know, when air drops were kind of quite high profile, and, I mean, some people were saying, you know, framing this as some kind of panacea, well, you know, air drops are more expensive, they're inaccurate, I mean, not only because you don't know exactly who this stuff is going to, but, you know, they also, we've seen, you know, the cases where the containers land on people, kill them. We've had people drowning, when they swim out to sea to collect stuff that was dropped in the sea. You know, now, there's much more discussion on the idea of the pier, you know, and bringing in aid by sea, estimates of 40 to 60 tons a day could be brought in by sea, but you know, the questions always remain. Who is going to unload and who is going to distribute? So, really, you know, the ideal option stares us in the face constantly, which is land, more crossings, more stuff through the crossings. And that's really, really what we need, you know, the other efforts are welcome, because any effort to increase aid is welcomed, but they're not the main event.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 43:52

Do you have a message to the international community and decision makers in this moment?

J

Jonathan Fowler 43:58

Key message to everyone, actually, involved in the international community, I mean, number one, is a ceasefire, to spare more lives from being lost, to protect civilians everywhere, protect civilian infrastructure, UN facilities. We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, because it's literally a matter of life and death for over 2 million people. We're also insisting that all hostages in Gaza must be released. There has to be a strict adherence to international humanitarian law, so civilians and civilian infrastructure, including UN premises, schools,

hospitals, places of worship and shelters, they have to be protected across the Gaza Strip at all times. This is an obligation, incumbent on everybody. The siege needs to be lifted. We have to have safe and uninterrupted and regular humanitarian and commercial supplies. Funding to UNRWA needs to be resumed completely, because we are the largest humanitarian organization in Gaza and we are the backbone of the aid operation. And our critical role in Gaza, and across the region, needs to be safeguarded during this unprecedented humanitarian crisis, and indeed, in any transition period that would follow a ceasefire. So we need actions to shield us from attempts to dismantle our operations and we need to have the necessary financial resources. We're also calling for an independent investigation and accountability for the blatant disregard of humanitarian workers. The eight operations on the UN facilities, all of which are protected under international law. The reason, I mean apart from accountability in itself, is that otherwise, there's a dangerous precedent that would be set, and this would actually compromise humanitarian work around the world, because if it's deemed to be okay to attack UN facilities, to hit convoys, you know, not just ourselves, I mean, World Central Kitchen, these other kind of tragic incidents, that sets a terrible precedent. So again, I mean, I've referred already to the war in Gaza as the war of superlatives. We must also not allow this war to become a new benchmark for what can and cannot happen in zones of conflict around the world.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 46:20

Thank you for joining us for this episode of Expert Voices on Atrocity Prevention. If you enjoyed this episode, we encourage you to subscribe to the podcast on Apple podcasts, SoundCloud, or Spotify. And we'd be grateful if you left us a review. For more information on the Global Centre's work on R2P, mass atrocity prevention, and populations at risk of mass atrocities, visit our website at [www.globalr2p.org](http://www.globalr2p.org) and connect with us on Twitter and Facebook @gcr2p.