**[Abandoning the people of Gaza](https://www.dawn.com/news/1809999/abandoning-the-people-of-gaza)**

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FOR months now, Muslims across the world have seen the people of Gaza suffer unspeakable horrors. According to the United Nations, the condition is beyond horrific with few working toilets and no place to shower for the thousands crammed into makeshift camps, hospitals, schools and anything still standing. Because this situation has gone on for so long, there are new problems emerging from the overcrowding. There are outbreaks of dysentery and respiratory illness — thanks to the absence of facilities to maintain a hygienic environment and the lack of sufficient food and water to nourish the sick and aid their recovery.

Then this past weekend, matters got even worse. The US, the UK, Australia, Germany and several other countries declared that they would suspend funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. This is catastrophic news for Gazans who have already faced unimaginable horrors since Oct 7. In response, the agency suspended “several” of its employees following allegations by Israel that some UNRWA staffers had a role in the Oct 7 Hamas strike.

The suspension of aid by these nations is a grotesque and heartless move. Undoubtedly, these countries are aware of what their actions are likely to do for those suffering in Gaza. The move came hours after the International Court of Justice declared that Israel should prevent a genocide against the Palestinians. This move likely annoyed Israel and its allies who have held that their massive bombing, shelling and raids of Gaza are justified because of the Oct 7 attacks. It also called into question the Israeli insistence that its actions in Gaza are justified as self-defence by ‘using any means necessary’.

Even as all this was happening, the Qataris were holding a meeting with Israel, the CIA and Egypt to come up with an elusive ceasefire. The sticking point in that negotiation is that Israel is not willing to agree to a permanent ceasefire, as it wants to be able to go back into Gaza and carry out further operations there whenever it deems it necessary.

The suspension of aid to UNRWA by a number of countries is a grotesque and heartless move.

The actions of those supporting Israel and suspending humanitarian funding are despicable. At the same time, given the length of the conflict and the desperation of the Gazans it is worth asking why Muslim humanitarian organisations have not been able to raise more funds to help the people in Gaza. It is not because there isn’t a framework to do this. Following 9/11 and the designation of many Western-based Islamic charities as implicated in terrorist funding (most of the allegations are baseless) many new Islamic charities with wider networks have emerged.

Meanwhile, a number of Muslim charities have done incredible work. One of them is Islamic Relief. The charity has been instrumental in providing aid all across the Muslim world — from the floods in Pakistan to running a camp of thousands of refugees in Yemen. Islamic Relief is collecting funds for Gaza but considering the thousands of people who have poured into the streets to protest against Israeli actions, there has not been a similar outpouring of funds being sent to the impoverished and war-affected: people have spoken with their feet but not with their wallets.

However, the people of the Muslim world can be forgiven. After all, most Muslim countries are poor and the people praying for Gaza within them are barely eking out an existence themselves. The post-Covid era has brought about joblessness, inflation and ailing economies. Predatory leaders regularly milk these publics for their own benefit, and so theirs is hardly an enviable existence.

There are, however, many rich Muslim countries. Headquartered in Saudi Arabia, the International Islamic Relief Organisation (different from the previously mentioned Islamic Relief) has made commitments to providing crisis relief at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. It has a budget running into tens of millions of dollars. Despite this, it is unclear what exactly this organisation is doing to help the people of Gaza. Surely, Muslim nations can pump in more funds if they really want to help the people of Gaza.

The announcement of the suspension of aid to UNRWA should have spurred an immediate me­­eting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. It is not known why hardly any Muslim country has made an effort to go beyond condemnatory statements and token assistance. Watching the videos of the recent wedding of the prince of Brunei I could not help but wonder how many people could be saved in Gaza if his new princess donated just one of the incredibly large diamond necklaces she wore to the many ceremonies.

The humanitarian aid complex, created as it was following the two world wars, has always been in the hands of Western nations who deem who is ‘human’ enough to be considered a part of humanity. The issues faced by non-white populations, largely Muslims, lie on the margins of the Western imagination; sometimes these people are considered human enough to receive humanitarian assistance. When this happens, the UN can come marching in with tents and blankets, and conditions can at least be marginally improved.

The Gazans have been deemed inhuman by this logic and they are suffering the consequences of that designation at the hands of the countries who have chosen to suspend funding to UNRWA. This need not be a death knell for the Gazans, Muslim countries can make up whatever deficit there is in funding, thus making a clear statement that the persecuted, displaced people of Gaza are not available to the West to abuse at will. There is an ideological position in this — for years now, Israel has wanted the dissolution of UNRWA clearly because it is a group created especially for Palestinian refugees to provide them with assistance and services. Allowing UNRWA to be dismembered in this manner is to allow Israel and the US to say that the long-suffering Palestinians do not have the right to return.

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