



הארגון הבינלאומי של עורכי-דין ומשפטנים יהודים (ע"ר)  
THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH LAWYERS AND JURISTS (R.A.)

## Human Rights Council 24<sup>th</sup> Session

### Item 7 – General Debate

NGO: IAJLJ - The International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists

Representative delivering the statement: Adv. Tom Gal

Thank you Mr. President,

The International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists wishes to take advantage of the discussions under Item 7 to address UNRWA's operations in the so-called OPT. It is our view that it's work poses an obstacle to the on-going peace talks between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority. By preserving the refugee status of millions of Palestinians, UNRWA undermines its mandate and diminishes the human rights situation of the Palestinians.

UNRWA has been operating in the Middle East since 1950. It was established for the sole purpose of protecting Palestinian refugees fleeing from the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948. At the time of its establishment, UNRWA's mandate applied to approximately 750,000 Palestinians. At present, UNRWA recognizes more than 5.5 million Palestinians as refugees. This is an unrealistic number that by itself poses an obstacle to the present peace-talks. Many of these Palestinian refugees live in the Gaza strip or in the West bank under the Palestinian Authority's jurisdiction. UNRWA's work in these areas preserves the refugee status of many Palestinians, condemning them to a life of dependency and poverty. Moreover, UNRWA's resources, founded on generous donations of States, are dedicated to such preservation and as result, in fact, relieving the Palestinian Authority from its responsibilities to protect the human rights of those Palestinians.

Therefore, we believe a transparent review of UNRWA's work should be conducted. Its mandate, agenda, allocation of resources and the parameters it applies to define who is a refugee eligible for protection should be evaluated. The review should also cover the assistance it lends to the Palestinian Authority and the de-facto Hamas government in the Gaza strip in respect to refugees under their jurisdiction. Such scrutiny would strengthen UNRWA's reliability. It would ensure transparency of funding and allocation of resources guaranteeing these are supporting the Palestinian Authority not relieving them of their duties. It would encourage adopting an up-to-date approach toward the Palestinian refugees issue so as to support the on-going peace process. Finally, as UNRWA's mandate resembles UNHCR mandate, a thorough review would help set priorities for dealing with the continuing influx of millions of refugees originating from other Middle East conflicts like the Syrian one, who are in dire need of humanitarian aid.