

1 March 2024

195 Lambton Quay
Private Bag 18–901
Wellington 6160
New Zealand

Regan Gibbons
fyi-request-25564-e94bfc93@requests.fyi.org.nz

T +64 4 439 8000
F +64 4 472 9596

OIA 29072

Tēnā koe Regan Gibbons

I refer to your email of 30 January 2024 in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

'I request all advice or communications the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has provided to the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister regarding the Government's decision to suspend funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency.'

Your request is refused in full under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the information requested does not exist. The Government has not suspended funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

New Zealand has supported UNRWA since its establishment in 1949, including through engagement on its mandate and financial contributions. In the absence of a two-state solution, it is New Zealand's longstanding view that UNRWA plays a unique and essential role in ensuring the humanitarian, development, and protection needs of Palestinian refugees are met in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the occupied Palestinian territories.

Under our current three-year arrangement with the Agency (FY 2021/22-FY 2023/24), New Zealand provides UNRWA with NZ\$1 million in funding annually to support their provision of essential humanitarian assistance for Palestinian refugees. Our next payment is due by mid-year, so we have time to consider the investigation into the serious allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the brutal 7 October 2023 Hamas terrorist attacks on Israel. This is not a pause or suspension.

New Zealand takes these allegations very seriously. It is important these allegations are properly understood and investigated urgently. We have confidence in the UN's ability to undertake this investigation and are engaging with partners on the process. We will be looking for evidence that the investigation is thorough, and that the allegations will be dealt with appropriately. We will also be looking for assurances that necessary measures are in place to guard against a recurrence. We remain acutely aware of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the critical role of UNRWA in the response.

Regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict and the situation in Gaza, the Government's strong focus is on the protection of civilians and the urgent need to stop the violence as soon as possible. In our public statements, New Zealand has called for a humanitarian truce / humanitarian pauses in fighting and the urgent need for further steps towards a sustainable ceasefire in order to put a stop to civilian suffering as soon as possible.

New Zealand will continue to advocate strongly for improved humanitarian access at all levels, including in Prime Minister and Foreign Minister engagements, and directly with Israel. New Zealand has provided a total of NZ\$15 million in financial support to the humanitarian response and welcomed action taken by the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly calling for safe, unhindered, and expanded humanitarian access.

Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. Therefore, our response to your request (with your personal information removed) may be published on the Ministry website: www.mfat.govt.nz/en/about-us/contact-us/official-information-act-responses/

If you have any questions about this decision, you can contact us by email at: DM-ESD@mfat.govt.nz. You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision by contacting www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sarah Corbett', written over a faint circular stamp.

Sarah Corbett
for Acting Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade