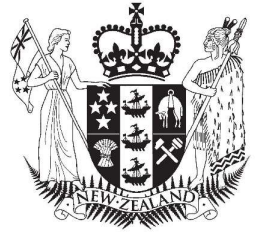


Rt Hon Winston Peters

Deputy Prime Minister

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Minister for Racing



4 April 2024

J Penwarden

fyi-request-26003-ef5fd4ba@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear J Penwarden

Thank you for your email of 5 March 2024 in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

'copies of all emails amongst media and communications staff supporting the minister's office that refers to the suspension of New Zealand's funding to the UNRWA. This includes correspondence sent by comms/media staff internally and externally, and also correspondence comms/media staff received from external sources. This request is for the period from January 24 to February 4th 2024. By staff supporting the minister's office, I'm referring to both MFAT comms/media staff and the Ministers' office staff who hold communications/media advisory roles. Happy for staff names and contact details to be redacted.'

Your request is refused under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the information requested does not exist.

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 (2021/22-2023/24), 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 allegations made against twelve UNRWA employees on 26 January 2024. 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 by the UN system. We strongly support the UN's investigation into the allegations, and the UN Secretary-General's appointment of an independent Review Group, led by Catherine Colonna, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, to assess whether UNRWA is doing everything within its power to ensure neutrality and to respond to allegations of serious breaches when they are made. We are engaging with partners on the process, including through our UN Mission in New York and other diplomatic posts. 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 safeguards are in place.

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. New Zealand has long advocated for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, leading to a lasting, sustainable peace. In this regard we welcomed the UN Security Council's resolution on 25 March 2024 demanding an immediate ceasefire and called on all parties to immediately comply with the resolution, including for Hamas to release all hostages and for Israel to play its part in enabling a rapid, massive and sustained increase in aid into Gaza.

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. The Ministry will continue to closely monitor the humanitarian crisis and consider how New Zealand can best support the response.

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.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Winston Peters". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt Hon Winston Peters
Minister of Foreign Affairs