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Citation: Blanchet, Karl, El-Zein, Abbas, Langer, Ana, Sato, Miho, Abdulrahim, Sawsan, Abouchacra, Kim, Afifi, Rima, Agnoletto, Vittorio, Akashi, Hidechika, Alameddine, Mohamad, Ansbro, Éimhín, Araújo-Soares, Vera, Assefi, Nassim, Baillie Smith, Matt, Bardus, Marco, Bhabha, Jacqueline, Bjertness, Espen, Blanchet, Karl, Borghi, Josephine, Busza, Joanna, Cammett, Melani, Campbell, Oona, Chaaban, Jad, Chalmers, Iain, Checchi, Francesco, Danaei, Goodarz, Dhaini, Hassan, Diaconu, Karin, Diwan, Ishac, Dominguez-Salas, Paula, Dubois, Elizabeth, El Kak, Faysal, El-Zein, Abbas, Eng, Eugenia, Eyal, Nir, Fawzi, Wafaie, Feder, Gene, Fujiya, Rika, Furukawa, Shota, Furusawa, Kiyoko, Futami, Akane, Germani, Aline, Ghattas, Hala, Giacaman, Rita, Goto, Ryunosuke, Grant, Liz, Greenough, Paul Gregg, Habib, Rima, Hagopian, Amy, Hajat, Shakoor, Hariga, Fabienne, Hatano, Ayako, Hay, Alastair, Holmboe-Ottesen, Gerd, Horiuchi, Sayaka, Hsiao, William, Huber, Daniela, Humble, Darryl, Imano, Taizo, Inoue, Yosuke, Ishizuka, Aya, Ismail, Ruba, Iwata, Rumi, Jabbour, Samer, Jamal, Diana, Jamaluddine, Zeina, Jimba, Masamine, Kabakian, Tamar, Kamiya, Yasuhiko, Karademas, Evangelos, Kashiwagi, Kenichi, Katsuma, Yasushi, Kinjo, Miyuki, Kiriya, Junko, Kitamura, Akiko, Kruk, Margaret E, Kubota, Kazumi, Langer, Ana, Leaning, Jennifer, Leng, Mhoira, Logam, Lana, Makhoul, Jihad, Matsuno, Akihisa, Matsuo, Yoshimi, McCoy, David, McGovern, Terry, McKee, Martin, McPake, Barbara, Melhem, Nada, Merriman, Anne, Michie, Susan, Millett, Christopher, Mishima, Chiaki, Miyachi, Takashi, Miyata, Hiroaki, Moodie, Rob, Morioka, Mariko, Mulholland, Kim, Mumtaz, Ghina, Murphy, Adrianna, Nagasawa, Eiji, Nagata, Kenichiro, Najem Kteily, Martine, Nakamura, Haruyo, Nakkash, Rima, Nambu, Makiko, Nava, Mica, Nelson, Erica L, Nishikida, Aiko, Nomura, Shuhei, Nozaki, Sayumi, Nuwayhid, Iman, O'Donnell, Kate, Ohashi, Masaaki, O'Laughlin, Kelli, Palmer, Jennifer, Patel, Preeti, Patel, Ronak, Pham, Phuong, Quezada-Yamamoto, Harumi, Ramia, Sami, Rawaf, Salman, Rihani, May, Roberts, Bayard, Roberts, Leslie, Ruff, Tilman A, Sahyoun, Nadine, Sakamoto, Haruka, Salti, Nisreen, Sato, Miho, Sato, Motoya, Sennett, Richard, Shallice, Tim, Shannon, Peter, Shiekh, Suhail, Shin, Kiho, Sibai, Abla M, Sieverding, Maia, Singh, Neha, Sullivan, Richard, Takahara, Takao, Tanigawa, Tomoyuki, Taniguchi, Hiroko, Testa, Adrienne, Thomas, Alban, Tsutsumi, Atsuro, Uechi, Manami, Usuki, Akira, Valente de Almeida, Sara, Wareham, Sue, Watt, Graham, West, Robert, Wigg, Peter, Wigg, Carol, Wikler, Daniel, Witter, Sophie, Yassin, Nasser, Yazdi, Youseph, Yoshino, Yasue, Yousafzai, Aisha, Yudkin, John S, Zaman, Mohammad H and Zurayk, Huda (2018) Support for UNRWA's survival. *The Lancet*, 392 (10152). pp. 1009-1010. ISSN 0140-6736

Published by: The Lancet Publishing Group

URL: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32264-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32264-5) <[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32264-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32264-5)>

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In support of UNRWA's survival: averting further loss of life, dignity and hope

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides life-saving humanitarian aid for 5.4 million Palestine refugees is now entering their eighth decade of statelessness and conflict. Facing little political immediate hope to return home. Approximately one third of Palestinian refugees still live in 58 recognized camps. UNRWA operates 702 schools and 144 health centres, including in the humanitarian disasters of today's Syria and Gaza. It has dramatically reduced infectious diseases, death including maternal mortality, and illiteracy. Its social services include rebuilding infrastructure and homes destroyed by conflict, and providing cash assistance and micro-finance loans for Palestinians whose rights are curtailed and who -- alone among the more recent refugees of the Middle East -- are denied the right of return to their homeland.

Yet UNRWA itself is fighting for survival. On the 31st of August, 2018 the Trump administration confirmed that the United States, previously UNRWA's largest donor, will no longer fund UNRWA.. Funding crises are not new to UNRWA. This crisis, however, is unprecedented.

An abrupt cessation of UNRWA services will create humanitarian emergencies that will increase the load in an already overburdened surrounding host countries. It will exacerbate existing conflicts, disrupt fragile peace, create new displacement, and generate disaffection and anger.

If no action is taken, governments are giving the green light to a ruinous, multi-faceted emergency that the region simply cannot bear. We, scientists and scholars, urge our governments to support UNRWA now. Sustain UNRWA services and avert further loss of life, dignity and hope.

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