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**United Methodist group questions Israeli crackdown on humanitarian aid organizations**

*UMKR says doubtful accusations and interrogation methods warrant further inquiry;  
notes serious ramifications for aid to Palestinians*

United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR) is deeply concerned about recent accusations by the Israeli government against an employee of World Vision, a Christian humanitarian organization that brings aid to children and families in need around the world. <sup>(1)</sup> Israeli authorities allege that the World Vision Director in Gaza has funneled a great deal of the charity's funds to Hamas.

United Methodist missionaries have worked alongside World Vision for many years, and both the organization and the individuals on staff have received high marks for compassion and good management. Contacted by UMKR about this story, retired UMC Missionary Bob Hannum said, "Peggy and I saw that World Vision did many projects for the neediest, in the West Bank and Gaza. Among all the non-governmental organizations who were helping, they were the best in knowing where the needs were and how to serve them. We have the highest respect and admiration for them."

UMKR also questions the investigation that led to these accusations. The accused World Vision staff member, Mr. Mohammad El Halabi, did not have access to a lawyer for more than three weeks. There are credible concerns that a confession may have been obtained under duress. <sup>(2)</sup>

Furthermore, World Vision's cumulative operating budget in Gaza for the past ten years was approximately \$22 million, and the Israeli authorities allege that an amount of nearly \$50 million was diverted to Hamas. This is hard to reconcile, especially since Mr. El Halabi has been the manager of their Gaza operations only for the last two and a half years. Both the president of World Vision and the Israeli media are questioning these inconsistencies. <sup>(3)</sup>

Israel has also accused employees of two other humanitarian aid organizations – the United Nations Development Program and Save the Children – of providing aid to Hamas. <sup>(4)</sup> UMKR notes that international aid organizations must obtain permission from and must cooperate with the governing authorities in the regions where they work; in Gaza, the governing authority is Hamas.

Of great concern for all aid workers and missionaries, including United Methodists, is the chilling effect these arrests and accusations will have on their efforts. Gazan children and families are in desperate need, and the material assistance of the international community is vital. Church advocates are also worried that allegations against church groups active in the region will inhibit efforts to address serious human rights violations in Israel and Palestine.

UMKR strongly encourages United Methodists and all those who have supported World Vision and other humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the past to look at the facts for themselves before coming to any conclusions. Provided below are a few sources of information and commentary on this story.

*United Methodists for Kairos Response is an independent, international, grassroots movement of laity and clergy in the United Methodist Church. UMKR seeks to answer the urgent call of Palestinian Christians for effective action to help end the Israeli occupation and achieve equality, freedom and dignity for all the people of the Holy Land.*

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## **End Notes**

### **1. World Vision website**

<http://www.worldvision.org/https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2016/08/05/world-vision-shocked-and-mystified-israel-charges-gaza-director-siphoning>

### **2. The Electronic Intifada: *Official from Christian charity tortured by Israel, lawyer says***

[https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/official-christian-charity-tortured-israel-lawyer-says?utm\\_content=buffer26269&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_campaign=bufferhttps://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/official-christian-charity-tortured-israel-lawyer-says?](https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/official-christian-charity-tortured-israel-lawyer-says?utm_content=buffer26269&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=bufferhttps://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/official-christian-charity-tortured-israel-lawyer-says?)

### **3. Statement from Kevin Jenkins, President and CEO of World Vision International**

<http://www.worldvision.org/press-release/statement-kevin-jenkins-president-and-chief-executive-officer-world-vision#sthash.ad6uks1z.dpuf>

### **Haaretz: *Israel's Allegations Against World Vision: Credible Charges or Political Ploy?***

<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.736041?v=A2D32E3447F07BDD90CB8E284401DD76>

### **4. Times of Israel: *Israel Charges UN employee with aiding Hamas in Gaza***

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-charges-un-employee-with-aiding-hamas-in-gaza/>

## **Other Reports**

### **World Vision: *Statement on World Vision Staff Arrest***

<http://www.wvi.org/jerusalem-west-bank-gaza/pressrelease/statement-world-vision-staff-arrest>

### **The Electronic Intifada: *What's really behind Israel's attack on Christian charity World Vision?***

<https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/whats-really-behind-israels-attack-christian-charity-world-vision>

### **Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)-Australia: *World Vision "shocked and mystified" as Israel charges Gaza employee for siphoning millions to Hamas***

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2016/08/05/world-vision-shocked-and-mystified-israel-charges-gaza-director-siphoning>

### **National Public Radio: *Israel Accuses World Vision Employee of Embezzling Millions For Hamas***

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/08/05/488809438/israel-accuses-world-vision-employee-of-embezzling-millions-for-hamas>

Dec. 2016 – Please note that this press release has been updated with UMKR's new name: United Methodists for Kairos Response.