

What Donors Should Know Following the Dutch Government's Decision to Cut Funding for UAWC

On Jan. 5, 2022, the Dutch Foreign Ministry published [a letter](#) to the Dutch Parliament announcing that it was cutting its financial support for the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), a leading Palestinian civil society organization based in Ramallah. This decision follows the conclusion of an external investigation conducted by Proximities Risk Consultancy into 'possible links' of UAWC with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a Palestinian group that the U.S. and EU have designated as a terrorist organization. In its letter, the Dutch Foreign Ministry summarized the main findings of Proximities' investigation. The investigation itself has not been made public.

Dutch Government Cleared UAWC of Organizational Links to the PFLP

The Dutch government cleared UAWC of organizational links to the PFLP, noting that it:

- *found no financial flows between UAWC and the PFLP*
- *found no indications of organisational unity between UAWC and the PFLP*
- *found no indications that the PFLP directs UAWC*
- *found no links between UAWC and the armed wing of the PFLP*
- *found no indications that board and staff members have used their position at UAWC for terrorist purposes*

In its letter to parliament, the Dutch Foreign Ministry noted that "on the basis of this investigation, it cannot be concluded that there are organizational links between UAWC and the PFLP."

Dutch Decision Based on Individual Links

The Dutch government nevertheless decided to cut its funding for UAWC, based on alleged links between individual staff and board members and the PFLP – despite the investigation finding "no evidence suggesting that UAWC staff or board members used their position in the UAWC to organise or support terrorist activities."

As UAWC pointed out in [a statement](#) responding to the Dutch government's decision to cut its funding, this decision "contradicts the letter and spirit of reassurances the European Union has provided to Palestinian civil society, when clarifying in a [March 2020 letter](#) to the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) that it 'does not ask any civil society organization ... to discriminate against any natural person based on his/her political affiliation.'"

In deciding to cut funding for UAWC based on alleged individual-level ties, the Dutch government is effectively forcing recipients of its funds to monitor, register and police the political affiliations of their staff and board members – a demand that runs counter to basic human rights of privacy, association and expression. In its [statement](#) responding to the Dutch decision, the Palestinian NGO umbrella PNGO denounced such interference as "political conditionality [which] is unacceptable and squarely rejected by PNGO."

Political Context

The Dutch government's decision to defund UAWC comes in the wake of the Israeli government designating six leading Palestinian NGOs, including UAWC, as terrorist groups in October 2021.

- In recent years, the Israeli government and a network of lawfare and disinformation groups has been mounting a [coordinated and politically motivated effort](#) to defame, deplatform and defund Palestinian civil society. The designations represent an escalation of those efforts.
- The Israeli government's designations rely on [unsubstantiated testimony](#) from two individuals with no direct links to the designated organizations, who may have been subjected to ill treatment and torture.
- These designations have been widely condemned by [UN experts](#), the [donor community](#) and [human rights groups](#) as unfounded and politically motivated.
- Based on all available information, U.S. and EU law do not prohibit financial support for UAWC or any of the other five Palestinian NGOs designated by the Israeli government.

Recommendations for Donors Seeking to Support Palestinian Civil Society

1. Have and project confidence in your due diligence and screening protocols.
2. Monitor and identify unsubstantiated allegations, particularly those that seek to associate Palestinian NGOs with the PFLP based on alleged individual links.
3. Expose and reject any political motivations of those calling for the defunding of Palestinian civil society organizations.
4. Stand up for the rights of privacy, association and expression: the political affiliations of staff and board members should not be used to blacklist organizations. Organizations should not be asked to monitor, register and police the political activities of their staff and board members.
5. Maintain your funding for Palestinian NGOs under attack, unless and until clear factual and legal grounds prevent you from doing so.

Resources

- For an in depth look at the lawfare and disinformation groups that are working to silence Palestinian civil society, read C&SN's report, [The Alarming Rise of Lawfare to Suppress Civil Society: The Case of Palestine and Israel](#). More background on the UAWC case can be found in our report on pages 73-79.
- For more information about the six organizations designated by the Israeli government in October 2021 and ways to support them, visit their joint website at www.palcivilsociety.com.