



## **UAWC shocked and saddened by Dutch government decision to end funding**

5 January 2022

The Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) is shocked and saddened by the decision of the Dutch government to end its funding for UAWC. With this fateful decision, the Dutch government is not just abandoning UAWC, but Palestinian civil society at large.

This is the first time a government ends its funding for Palestinian civil society based on political conditionality. By doing so, the Netherlands tarnishes its reputation as a reliable donor and its status of a value-based country that hosts and promotes international law.

The Dutch Foreign Ministry announced its decision today following a funding suspension that lasted 18 months and that caused serious harm to our organization, projects and beneficiaries. It has also subjected UAWC to an external investigation, which has burdened our organization throughout 2021.

From the onset, this investigation was politically motivated and responded to pressure of the Israeli government and malign organizations affiliated with it. Whereas the investigation was triggered by one incident, i.e. the arrest of two former employees of UAWC suspected by Israeli authorities of involvement in an attack, the Dutch government resorted to a broad and general research question to identify any 'possible links between UAWC and the PFLP'.

Due to our strategic work to protect Palestinian land threatened by Israeli annexation, UAWC has been a target for many years of Israeli smear campaigns trying to associate our organization with the PFLP. While we felt concerned the Dutch investigation may feed such campaigns, we decided without delay to cooperate with it, based on our trust in the Dutch government, which has been a leading donor of UAWC since 2013.

As confirmed by the Dutch government in its [letter](#) today to the Dutch parliament, this investigation, conducted by Proximities Risk Consultancy, has:

- 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 addition, the Dutch Foreign Ministry determined that Proximities' research provides no basis to conclude that UAWC has any organizational links with the PFLP.

All of these findings reflect UAWC's status and existence as an independent organization, which has no political or religious affiliation with any party or political organization.



It is shocking and deeply troubling that the Dutch government nevertheless decided to end its funding for UAWC. It did so based on a number of “individual links” that Proximities identified – alleged connections in private capacity of board and staff members of UAWC with the PFLP.

When the Dutch government announced its investigation, we immediately stated our clear objection to it being extended to individuals. Based on Palestinian law and basic human rights standards, UAWC cannot (and does not want to) interfere with the personal political beliefs and affiliations of its employees and board members. As also confirmed by Proximities, UAWC has and applies a solid internal policy to preserve its organizational independence and political neutrality within the limitations set by Palestinian law and human rights.

Proximities’ investigation has been characterized by a stunning lack of transparency. We only learned at a late stage that UAWC’s board and staff members had been included in it. Among Proximities’ findings, we identified multiple factual inaccuracies, including several mistaken identities, which we reported. It is not clear to us if and how these corrections have been applied to the final report Proximities submitted to the Dutch Foreign Ministry.

We are shocked that the Dutch government has ended its funding for a leading Palestinian civil society organization and a long time partner like UAWC, based on alleged individual links resembling the toxic allegations of Israeli groups like NGO Monitor. This decision also contradicts the letter and spirit of reassurances the European Union has provided to Palestinian civil society, when clarifying in a March 2020 letter to PNGO that it “does not ask any civil society organization ... to discriminate against any natural person based on his/her political affiliation.”

After many years of close and dedicated cooperation, the Dutch government decision to end its funding for UAWC amounts to a breach of trust, which is likely to resonate far beyond our organization. It comes at a time that Palestinian civil society is under unprecedented attack.

The Israeli government will seize the decision to further escalate its all-out attack on Palestinian civil society, following its designation last October of six Palestinian NGOs as terrorist organizations. More specifically, the decision legitimizes and encourages the Israeli tactic of attacking Palestinian NGOs through alleged political affiliations of their board and staff members. All of this is diverting international attention from Israel’s theft and confiscation of more Palestinian land and its brutal suppression of the Palestinian people living under military occupation.

We are particularly saddened that the process leading to today’s decision was initiated by former Dutch Development Minister Sigrid Kaag, who has witnessed the relevance of our work and the vitality of UAWC during her visit to the West Bank in February 2020. No one understands the context in Palestine and the implications of the Dutch government decision to end funding for UAWC better than Ms. Kaag.

We will consider legal steps to challenge today’s harmful and unfair decision by the Dutch government, which lacks valid grounds.

At this critical hour, we call on other donors to maintain and increase their support for UAWC and all Palestinian civil society organizations. Don’t abandon us.