



February 23, 2017

## Dr. Suhail al-Hindi, Chairman of the UNRWA Staff Union in the Gaza Strip and Boys' Elementary School Principal, Is Elected to Hamas' New Gaza Political Bureau



Dr. Suhail al-Hindi, chairman of the UNRWA staff union in the Gaza Strip, leads a demonstration of Gazan UNRWA workers to protest the agency's intention to reduce its budget for the Gaza Strip (Arab Today, August 2, 2015).

1. Elections were recently held for Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip, the movement's supreme institution in Gaza. Fifteen members were elected, headed by Yahya Sinwar. It has a large number of members affiliated with Hamas' military wing and is dominated by members who hold extremist views.
2. One of the newly-elected members is **Dr. Suhail Ahmed Hassan al-Hindi**, who holds a PhD from Cairo University (his thesis dealt with improving the conditions of Palestinians teachers under the Israeli "occupation"). Since 2012 he has been the chairman of the UNRWA staff union in the Gaza Strip, **controlled by Hamas**.<sup>1</sup> In 2015 and 2016 **he led demonstrations protesting UNRWA's intention to reduce its activities in Gaza** because of budget cutbacks. The protests, which included sanctions and strikes in UNRWA institutions in the Strip, were widely covered by the

<sup>1</sup> In September 2012 elections were held for the UNRWA staff union in the Gaza Strip, in which 11,500 employees voted. The Hamas list, headed by **Dr. Suhail al-Hindi**, received an overwhelming majority of votes. **The Palestinian media reported that Hamas had had complete control over the union since its establishment** (al-Risalah, September 12 and 17, 2012).

media. In December 2016 the union reached a fundamental understanding with UNRWA and ended its protests and sanctions (gazaonline.net, December 20, 2016)



**Dr. Suhail al-Hindi, chairman of the UNRWA staff union, holds a press conference near UNRWA headquarters during a protest (al-Risalah, December 20, 2016).**

3. In addition to his role as union chairman, **he is also the principal of the Palestine Boys' Elementary School, an UNRWA school for refugee children.** On February 10, 2017, the school held a ceremony honoring students who excelled in their studies. The ceremony was attended by **Bo Schack**, director of UNRWA operations in the Gaza Strip, who sat on stage and was photographed with Dr. al-Hindi (Facebook page of Yasser Abu Zakariya, February 10, 2017).



Left: Dr. Suhail al-Hindi, principal of an UNRWA school, speaking at a ceremony honoring students who excelled in their studies. Right: Dr. Suhail al-Hindi (center), Bo Schack to the right (Facebook page of Yasser Abu Zakariya, February 10, 2017).

## Dr. Suhail al-Hindi's Election to Hamas Leadership in the Gaza Strip, and His Repeated Denial

4. Dr. Suhail al-Hindi's name appeared on the list of the members of Hamas' newly-elected political bureau published in the Palestinian media. In ITIC assessment, the list is reliable (a "senior Hamas source" confirmed the authenticity of the names to the Quds Press news agency).
5. After his election had been publicly announced, **Dr. al-Hindi issued a series of vigorous denials, claiming he had not been elected to the bureau.** He even claimed **he planned to sue those responsible for the reports.** So far, Hamas has not formally related to the issue of his election.



The Facebook page of Dr. Suhail al-Hindi, where he posted a denial of the report of his election to Hamas' political bureau (Reposted to the Facebook pages of the Jabalia refugee camp, Palestine Tajmaa'na and the northern Gaza Strip, and Paltoday, February 13, 2017).



Report of a telephone conversation between Dr. Suhail al-Hindi and the Sawa news agency in the Gaza Strip, in which he strongly denied he was elected to Hamas' political bureau (PaSawa news agency, February 13, 2017).

6. In ITIC assessment, Dr. al-Hindi's denial should be viewed with suspicion. His vigorous denials may be the result of the fact that publicizing his election will make difficulties for him (and Hamas) in dealing with UNRWA. In the past UNRWA objected to its staff belonging to Hamas or other organizations, although the agency never took decisive action to enforce its objections.

7. **The problematic nature of electing Hamas activists to UNRWA positions was illustrated in 2009.** On March 25, 2009, elections were held for the UNRWA employees union in the Gaza Strip. Despite the explicit UNRWA regulation against running for election under the name of an organization, **Hamas won great support among UNRWA's employees.** According to Palestinian sources at the time, Hamas won 17 of the union's 27 seats (al-Bayan Media Center, March 25, 2009). **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** said Hamas' victory [in the UNRWA elections] showed **"that the entire Palestinian people followed the resistance and its path of success, and that indicated Hamas' popularity"** (al-Bayan Media Center, March 25, 2009). At the time Hamas' victory caused tension between the movement and UNRWA. **John Ging, who was then the director of UNRWA operations in the Gaza Strip,** threatened to fire UNRWA employees who belonged to Hamas or other organizations, **but in the end the threat was not carried out.**<sup>2</sup> In September 2012 UNRWA employees in the Gaza Strip held elections and the **Hamas list, headed by Dr. al-Hindi, received an overwhelming majority of the votes.**

8. The election of Dr. Suhail al-Hindi to Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip is **another illustration of Hamas' deep penetration into the Gaza Strip's educational system and of the great power of its activists in UNRWA institutions in the Strip.** That allows Hamas to **systematically indoctrinate Gazan school children with its extremist Islamist ideology.** In addition, Hamas' great influence on the educational system in the Gaza Strip enables it to hold paramilitary activities within schools, **training young children to join Hamas and the ranks of its military wing.** Since **Hamas is the power ruling the Gaza Strip, its ideological and military activities in the educational system are not curbed either by UNRWA** (which operates many educational and social institutions in the Gaza Strip) or **by the Palestinian Authority** (which is formally responsible for the educational system in the Gaza Strip, but as in many other governmental areas, its actual influence is limited).

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<sup>2</sup> Hamas called for John Ging to be removed from his position, but he continued until 2012. In 2012 he was replaced by Robert Turner. For further information, see the April 28, 2009 bulletin, "Hamas lashes out against the UNRWA chief in the Gaza Strip," at <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/article/18281>.