



March 27, 2017

Hamas's military wing uses foreign aid funds sent to the Gaza Strip:

The case of the head of the Gaza Strip office of the Turkish aid organization TIKA



Muhammad Murtaja, head of TIKA's Gaza office (palsawa.com, February 13, 2017)

Overview

1. In February 2017, the Israeli security forces arrested **Muhammad Faruq Sha'aban Murtaja**, a resident of the Gaza Strip, the head of **TIKA's** Gaza office. TIKA is a humanitarian aid organization operating on behalf of the Turkish government throughout the world, including in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. Murtaja was arrested on suspicion of having **worked for the military wing of Hamas in his capacity as head of TIKA's Gaza office** (Israel Security Agency, March 21, 2017).
2. During his interrogation, **it emerged that Murtaja had been recruited to Hamas in late 2008 and that he had worked for its military wing since 2009**. As part of his activity as a Hamas operative, **he received military training and stored weapons in his house**. Murtaja was detained while passing through the Erez Crossing on his way to Ankara. His interrogation revealed that the purpose of his trip to Turkey was to participate in TIKA in-service training. However, **his trip was also intended to obtain information that would help Hamas improve the accuracy of its rockets** (Israel Security Agency, March 21, 2017). According to the indictment filed against him at the

Beersheba District Court, he was sent to Turkey by the military wing of Hamas in order **to obtain maps based on Turkish satellite photos** (Haaretz Israeli daily, March 22, 2017).

3. In 2012, about three years after joining Hamas's military wing, **Murtaja was appointed head of TIKA's Gaza office. Hamas apparently encouraged him to accept this position** from the perspective that it would be able to use him to advance its interests. During Murtaja's interrogation, it emerged that **since joining TIKA, he had transferred to Hamas funds and resources** intended for humanitarian purposes or civilian projects in the Gaza Strip, **in the amount of millions of dollars**. He transferred funds to Hamas operatives and their families and allocated homes to Hamas operatives in a building project designated for the needy (Israel Security Agency, March 21, 2017).



Muhammad Murtaja, head of the TIKA branch in the Gaza Strip (second from left), meeting with the heads of the Hamas-affiliated Dar al-Quran al-Karim wal-Sunnah organization. The purpose of the meeting was to strengthen the ties between the two organizations (Website of Dar al-Quran al-Karim wal-Sunnah, April 23, 2014).

4. The phenomenon of “wearing two hats,” i.e., **officials of international aid organizations who also serve in Hamas and promote its interests**, is well known from the past (recently in the form of senior Hamas activists working for UNRWA). **Stealing resources from TIKA** and transferring them to Hamas's military wing is **also a known phenomenon**. In the past, it was reported that **the World Vision** aid organization had employed an engineer by the name of **Muhammad Halabi** who secretly transferred some of the humanitarian aid funds to Hamas's military wing. Another example: An engineer by the name of **Wahid Abdullah**, who worked for the

United Nations Development Program (UNDP), transferred money to Hamas's military wing, inter alia for the construction of a military port in the northern Gaza Strip. In addition, Murtaja's interrogation also revealed that during the years that he served as **deputy head of the Gaza branch of IHH**, an anti-Israel Turkish aid organization, he regularly transferred aid funds from Turkey to Hamas's military wing.

Turkey's response

5. Turkey's response (so far) has been characterized by a low profile. Turkey has refrained from turning the affair into a bone of contention between the two countries.

6. Even before the gag order was lifted, Israel provided the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Turkish Embassy in Israel with the details of the indictment. On February 23, 2017, the Anatolia News Agency reported that the Israeli authorities had arrested Muhammad Murtaja on February 12, 2017, and claimed that they were preventing him from meeting with a lawyer (Anatolia News Agency, February 23, 2017). The Turkish press published informative reports on the arrest of Muhammad Murtaja on charges of "supporting terrorism" (Milliyet; Yeni Şafak, March 21, 2017). The Turkish media quoted the Israel Security Agency's announcement that TIKA had not been aware of Murtaja's activities within Hamas and that Murtaja had defrauded his employers and had taken advantage of the organization's budget (Anatolia News Agency, February 23, 2017).

7. **Hüseyin Müftüoğlu, Spokesperson of the Turkish Foreign Ministry**, issued a statement noting that Murtaja was an employee of TIKA's Gaza office since 2012. According to the statement, he was arrested at the Erez Crossing on February 12, 2017, after receiving a permit from Israel to attend a professional seminar in Ankara for the organization's employees. According to the spokesman, Turkey asked Israel for complementary information about Murtaja. Meanwhile, all relevant legal support necessary for protecting Murtaja's rights is being provided. The spokesman said that TIKA's development assistance activities in Gaza are being carried out with Palestinian authorities' consent and with the knowledge of the Israeli government. Therefore, any attempt affecting the security of the parties has never been tolerated or allowed. The spokesman concluded that "TIKA will continue, in the future as in the past, its projects with diligence and devotion in order to alleviate the plight of Palestinian people, including in Gaza, which emanates from the 50-year-long occupation" (Turkish Foreign Ministry website, March 22, 2017).

Hamas's response

8. **Hamas Spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** issued an official statement in response to Murtaja's arrest. According to the statement, Israel has targeted international organizations and is arresting their directors. The statement notes that Israel recently arrested the head of TIKA's office in the Gaza Strip and is disseminating **accusations and lies** about him. According to the statement, these steps are part of an "extensive Zionist campaign" to impose a siege on the Gaza Strip and terrorize international institutions so that they will not provide services to the destitute, children and owners of demolished homes in Gaza (Hamas's official website, March 21, 2017).

Appendices

9. Attached are three appendices:

A. Appendix A: The TIKA aid agency and its activities in the Palestinian arena

B. Appendix B: Hamas's theft of TIKA's aid funds by means of Muhammad Murtaja

C. Appendix C: Further examples for the theft of aid funds by Hamas

- 1) IHH
- 2) World Vision
- 3) UNDP

Appendix A

The TİKA aid agency and its activities in the Palestinian arena



Right: TİKA's logo. Left: The head of the organization, Dr. Serdar Çam (TİKA website)

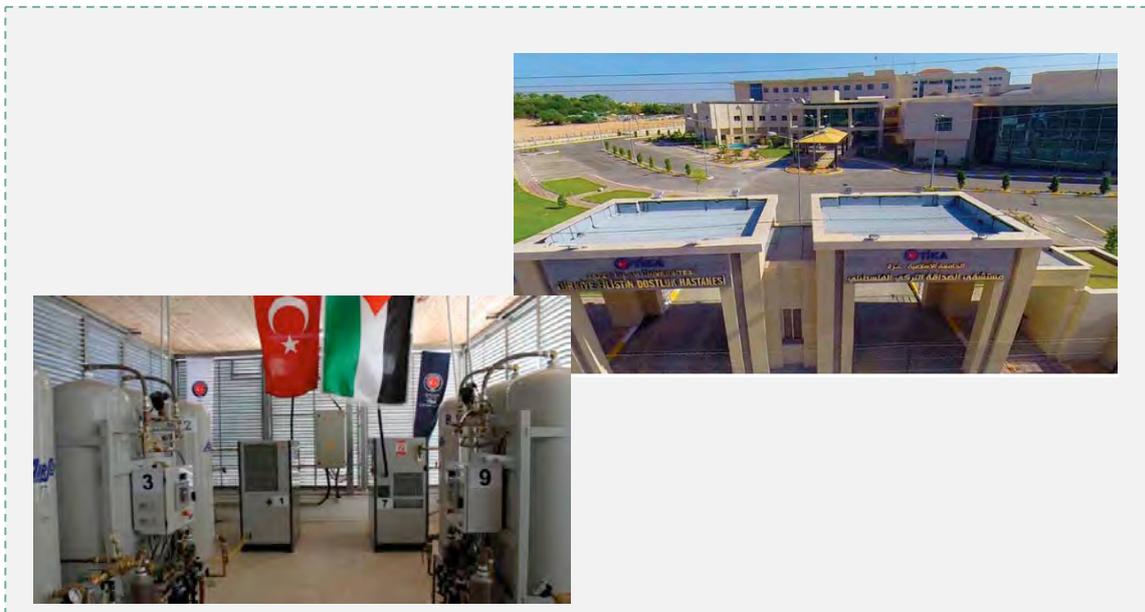
Overview

1. **The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) is a Turkish government aid agency subordinate to the Prime Minister's Office.** The organization was founded in 1992 to promote Turkish foreign policy through aid activities to developing countries around the world. Initially, its activities were directed at the Turkish-speaking countries of the former Soviet Union in the Caucasus and Central Asia, to which Turkey offered economic, social and cultural cooperation and assistance. In the early 21st century, with the change in Turkish foreign policy, TİKA expanded, changed its operating methods and added offices and representative offices around the world. Thus, the agency grew from 12 branches in 2002 to 25 in 2011 and 33 in 2012.

2. **Most of TİKA's funding comes from the Turkish government.** Parallel to the growth of the agency, the ruling party in Turkey (AKP) introduced changes in legislation in order to help TİKA obtain more funding. As a result, between 2006 and 2009 Turkey increased its international aid to the sum of \$700 million (compared with \$40-80 million until 2002). **In 2015, it amounted to \$3.9 billion. TİKA is currently involved in a variety of collaborative development projects in 140 countries.**

3. **Dr. Serdar Çam has been the president of TİKA since June 2011.** He is a chemical engineer by profession, who earned advanced degrees in the US, Belgium and Germany. Prior to his election, Çam had worked for seven years as **Chief of Cabinet of Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan in his Parliamentary Office.** From 1992-2002, he was a senior executive at several companies in Ankara, Istanbul and outside Turkey.

4. In the Palestinian Authority, **TİKA operates out of its coordination office, which is located in Ramallah. The agency has a liaison office in Gaza City** that handles its activity in the Gaza Strip. According to an official statement issued by the Turkish Consulate General in Jerusalem on May 25, 2016, **Turkish assistance to Palestine had reached \$369 million in the past decade.** Since the establishment of its Ramallah coordination office, TİKA has carried out 117 projects in Judea and Samaria, 113 in the Gaza Strip, and 63 in Jerusalem. In 2014 (the year of Operation Protective Edge), **Turkey provided \$76.3 million in assistance, including \$24.5 million in emergency assistance.** A TİKA statement from May 2016 mentions two large-scale projects **carried out in the Gaza Strip:** one, the completion of the construction and equipping of a hospital in the Gaza Strip. The other, the beginning of the construction of 320 housing units for residents whose homes were destroyed in Operation Protective Edge (Statement of the Turkish Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in response to a question regarding Turkey's assistance to Palestine, May 27, 2016).



Right: The hospital built by TİKA in Gaza. Left: Medical equipment provided to the hospital by the organization (the organization's website)

Appendix B

Hamas's theft of TIKA's aid funds by means of Muhammad Murtaja

1. **Muhammad Faruq Sha'aban Murtaja**, head of TIKA's Gaza office, has served for many years **as a means for Hamas for stealing Turkish humanitarian aid funds intended for the population in the Gaza Strip and transferring them to Hamas's military wing.**

2. Muhammad Murtaja was born in 1977 in Gaza City. He is married and a father of four sons. **A construction engineer by profession.** He studied in Turkey. **He was recruited to Hamas in 2008. In 2009, he joined the engineering unit of Hamas's military wing.** During these years, **he also served as deputy head of the Gaza branch of the IHH, a Turkish aid organization declared in several countries, including Israel, as a terror organization; he also used this position for transferring funds to Hamas** (see below). Afterwards, he asked to join TIKA, taking advantage of his "Turkish background" (his studies in Turkey and the experience he acquired in working with a Turkish organization). He became involved in TIKA's activity, until he was appointed in 2012 the head of TIKA's Gaza office.

3. Murtaja's interrogation reveals that **since he joined TIKA, he funneled to Hamas funds and resources intended for civilian projects for the residents of the Gaza Strip.** The amounts of money he transferred to Hamas **had reached millions of dollars.** Following are several examples (Israel Security Agency, March 21, 2017):

a. On orders by Hamas leadership, Murtaja forged lists of students and people in need, **who included only Hamas operatives, in order to take advantage of the funds allocated to the Gaza Strip residents for humanitarian purposes.** It is estimated that **at least \$3 million were transferred to Hamas in this manner.**¹

b. TIKA assisted a project of mass wedding organized in the Gaza Strip, at a cost of \$4 million. Most of the "grooms" in these wedding ceremonies were **operatives of Hamas's military wing, without TIKA's knowledge. Among the**

¹ In an interview with a Saudi newspaper, Murtaja enumerated projects that TIKA had carried out in the recent two years. Inter alia, he noted the transfer of financial aid to students in the Gaza Strip in the sum of \$1,000 per student (Al-Sharq, November 3, 2016). According to Murtaja's admission, these students were Hamas operatives.

grooms were Abu Salam, the son of Ismail Haniyeh, the deputy head of Hamas's Political Bureau, and sons of other senior Hamas officials.²

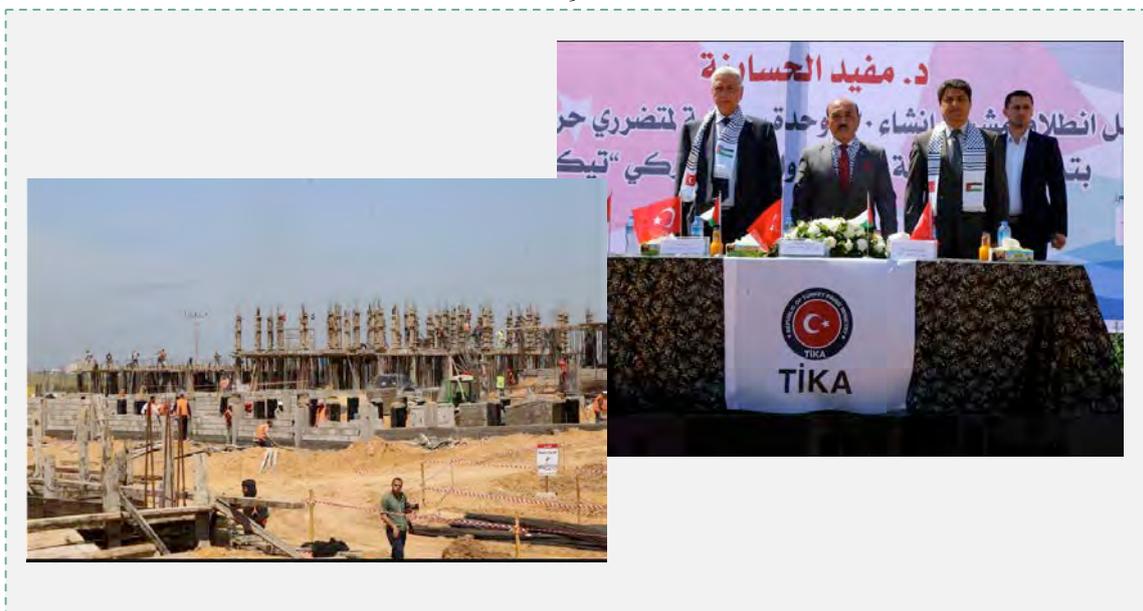


Right: Mass wedding ceremony funded by Turkey. Left: Ismail Haniyeh delivering a speech during the event (Palestine Today, May 31, 2015). Among the “grooms” was Abu Salam, Ismail Haniyeh’s son. Most of the “grooms,” according to Murtaja’s admission, were Hamas operatives.

c. TIKA carried out a construction project of twenty residential buildings at a cost of \$13 million for needy residents in the Gaza Strip. The buildings which were finally built **were intended for operatives of Hamas’s military wing.**³

² On May 31, 2015, a mass wedding ceremony for 4,000 brides and grooms took place at the Yarmouk Stadium in Gaza City. The wedding ceremony was funded by the Turkish government. **Ismail Haniyeh, deputy head of Hamas’s Political Bureau, who attended the ceremony, greeted the couples and Turkey for the support and assistance.** He also noted that the event was part of completing the resistance’s joy of victory on its achievements during the recent war, which was also the longest one. In Murtaja’s interview with the Saudi newspaper, he noted that every couple that got married received \$2,000.

³ In the interview with the Saudi newspaper, Murtaja noted that TIKA was carrying out the project of the residential buildings, which was intended for needy families and families whose houses were hit in Israel’s Operation Protective Edge, at the cost of \$13.5 million. The project is being carried out in the area of Jahr al-Dik, south of Gaza City, and includes 320 housing units. The project is expected to end in January 2018. From Murtaja’s interrogation, it emerged that the project included houses for operatives of Hamas’s military wing.



Right: The inauguration ceremony of the building project of 320 housing units, which were hit during Operation Protective Edge, in the Jahr al-Dik area (central Gaza Strip). The ceremony was held in the presence of Bülent Korkmaz, TIKA's representative, who had signed the Turkish construction project in the amount of \$13 million. Left: The construction site (Facebook page of the Ministry of Construction and Public Works in Ramallah, March 23, 2016)

d. In another project, called "Humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip," **Murtaja transferred \$2 million for families of terrorists of Hamas's military wing.**

e. During Operation Protective Edge (2014), 84,000 food packages intended for the needy were transferred to the Gaza Strip by TIKA during the fighting. **The packages were delivered directly to Hamas's military operatives.**⁴

4. On February 12, 2017, Muhammad Murtaja left, through the Erez Crossing, for Ankara, Turkey. The official pretext for his departure was a **professional seminar on behalf of TIKA**. However, his interrogation revealed that the trip was also intended to obtain **information that would assist Hamas in improving the accuracy of its rockets** (Israel Security Agency, March 21, 2017). From the indictment filed against him at the Beersheba District Court, it emerges that **he was sent to Turkey by Hamas's military wing to obtain maps based on the photos of a Turkish satellite** (Haaretz Israeli daily, March 22, 2017).

⁴ Muhammad Murtaja stated that on July 15, 2014 (during Operation Protective Edge), by the orders of the Turkish prime minister, the agency started to distribute food products and humanitarian aid to residents of the Gaza Strip (Anatolia News Agency, July 15, 2014).

Appendix C

Further examples for the theft of aid funds by Hamas

Overview

1. The case of TIKA is **not the first of its kind**. In the past, other cases were exposed, in which aid funds **intended for humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip population were funneled by Hamas operatives, employed by the aid organizations, to the needs of Hamas's military wing**. The ITIC believes that in **most cases, the theft of the funds was carried out without the knowledge of the aid organizations, with Hamas taking advantage of its control over the Gaza Strip and the pressure it can exert on local employees engaged by the aid organizations**.

IHH

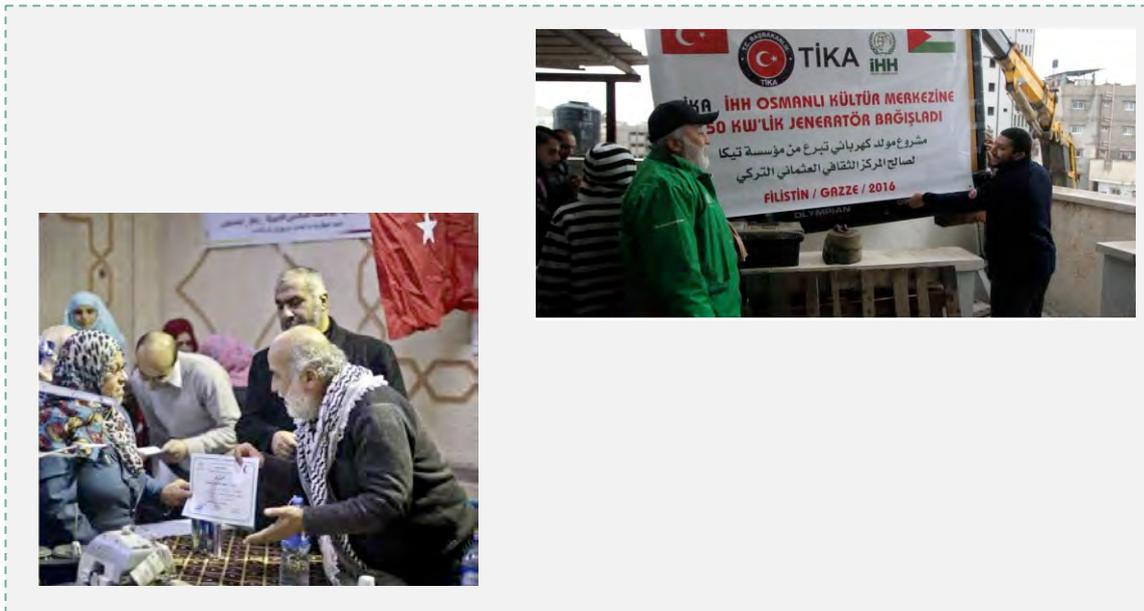


IHH logo

2. Another Turkish aid organization mentioned by Muhammad Murtaja is **IHH**. Before his activity in TIKA, **Murtaja served as deputy head of the local branch of IHH in the Gaza Strip**. His interrogation revealed that **Mohammad Kaya, who heads the IHH branch in the Gaza Strip, had systematically, for years, transferred to Hamas's senior officials funds in cash that arrived from Turkey** (Israel Security Agency, March 21, 2017). From Murtaja's interrogation, it emerged that he had used his position in Hamas and the IHH **to transfer funds to Hamas in the sum of \$80,000**. Unlike in the case of TIKA, **the ITIC does not rule out the possibility that**

other officials in the IHH, which is an anti-Israel organization with a jihadi record (see below), knew about the transfer of the funds to Hamas.

3. Muhammad Murtaja transferred from the IHH aid funds in the amount of \$80,000 for the construction of a training facility (a swimming pool) for the operatives of Hamas's naval force; \$11,000 were transferred to fund uniforms for Hamas's Special Forces. Other funds were funneled to fund the construction of outposts and tunnels and the smuggling of weapons to the Gaza Strip. All these actions were carried out with the involvement of the Hamas leadership. One of the figures mentioned was Marwan Issa, Hamas's military wing's senior commander and a member of Hamas's Political Bureau (Israel Security Agency, March 21, 2017).



Right: The transfer of generators for an IHH project in the Gaza Strip (TIKA website), March 2016.
 Left: Mohammad Kaya, head of the IHH branch in the Gaza Strip, distributes sewing machines contributed by TIKA to women in the Gaza Strip (Dunya al-Watan, December 27, 2015).

IHH – Overview⁵

4. IHH is a Turkish jihadi, radical Islamic, anti-Israeli, anti-American and anti-Semitic organization. **This organization, which is linked to the Turkish government, represents an important component of the international coalition engaged in delegitimizing Israel.** IHH has been involved in the past with coalition activities (flotillas to the Gaza Strip) while collaborating with other anti-Israel organizations in the West and with organizations affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. **The head of the organization is Bülent Yıldırım**, an Islamist, anti-Israeli activist. IHH's main activity is **in the field of humanitarian aid to Islamic regions in need throughout the world.** However, in the past, the IHH also **had ties with global jihadists.** Due to that, it has been declared by several countries, including Israel, as a **terrorist organization.**

5. **The IHH had a major role in the Mavi Marmara flotilla**, which ended in a violent confrontation on board the Mavi Marmara ship (May 31, 2010). IHH operatives took active part in the violent confrontation on the Mavi Marmara, which resulted in the death of nine Turkish activists, with nine Israeli IDF soldiers wounded and dozens of wounded among the passengers. The central role played by the IHH in the flotilla came into expression in the planning, the purchase of the three vessels for the flotilla (including the Mavi Marmara); placing governmental capabilities at the disposal of the coalition that launched the flotilla; and planning the violent confrontation with the IDF, without conveying this information to the IHH's companions in the coalition.

6. IHH is active in the Gaza Strip, providing aid to the Palestinians. It holds close ties with the representatives of TIKA in the Gaza Strip. So far, the ITIC has not encountered any evidence for the "spillover" of IHH aid funds to Hamas's military wing, and this case is the first of its kind.

⁵ For further details, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from August 13, 2014: "IHH, the jihadist Turkish organization that played a major role in the Mavi Marmara flotilla, currently leads an international anti-Israeli coalition that announced its intention to dispatch another flotilla to the Gaza Strip in 2014." <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/article/20703>

World Vision



World Vision logo (World Vision website, March 26, 2017)

7. On June 2016, the Israeli security forces arrested Muhammad Halabi, World Vision's Gaza head, at the Erez Crossing. According to the indictment filed against him, for six years, he had funneled to Hamas's military wing dozens of millions of US dollars, funds received by his organization as contributions from the United States and European countries. Halabi, a civil engineer by profession, is suspected of having been recruited to Hamas's military wing in 2004. After about a year, he was requested to infiltrate World Vision and act there secretly to transfer to Hamas's military wing some of the aid funds earmarked for the welfare of the population in the Gaza Strip. Halabi's court case is still ongoing.



Muhammad Halabi, World Vision's Gaza head (arab48.com, August 4, 2016)

8. According to the indictment filed against Muhammad Halabi, Hamas's military wing received in this manner **the sum of \$7.2 million every year**. The funds funneled to Hamas's military wing were intended for **the construction of military outposts, digging tunnels, and obtaining weapons**. According to the indictment, Halabi took advantage of the entry permit that he had from Israel by virtue of his position at World Vision, traveling freely through the region **and identifying possible sites for the opening of shafts for attack tunnels in Israeli territory** (Israel Security Agency; Israel's Southern District Prosecution, August 4, 2016).

9. According to the Israel Security Agency, the organization funds served for various purposes: **construction of Hamas's outpost in Bet Hanoun, at the cost of \$80,000 raised in Britain; payment of the wages of Hamas operatives and even the distribution of rewards for those who fought against Israel in Operation Protective Edge**. These actions were carried out with the knowledge of other employees in the organization. Hamas, on its part, denied any connection to Muhammad Halabi and emphasized that what was published in the Israeli media was baseless (alresala.net, August 4, 2016).

10. World Vision International is a global Christian relief, development and advocacy organization dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. It has branches and offices throughout the world. In Israel, the organization has been active since 1975 among the Palestinians in Judea, Samaria, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Its purpose is to work with children, families and communities and assist them in overcoming poverty. According to the organization, it serves everyone, no matter what their religion, race, ethnicity or

gender may be. On the organization's board of directors there are representatives from Austria, Australia, Columbia, Taiwan, Canada, and also private people. In 2015, private people contributed to the organization about \$570 million (the organization website).

UNDP



UNDP logo (UNDP website, March 21, 2017)

11. In July 2016, the Israeli security forces arrested **Wahid Abdullah al-Bursh**, 38, from Jebaliya (northern Gaza Strip), on suspicion that he **used his work at the UNDP agency to fund the activity of Hamas's military wing**. Wahid Abdullah al-Bursh **worked as an engineer in UNDP** since 2003.

12. As part of his work, Wahid al-Bursh served, inter alia, as the person in charge of the demolition of houses damaged in confrontations and the removal of the debris. In 2014, **he was instructed by a senior Hamas official to transfer funds to Hamas as part of his job. He assisted Hamas's military wing in 2015 to construct a port in the northern Gaza Strip by resources that originated in UNDP**. In addition, he made sure that **Hamas operatives receive priority in rebuilding their houses** (Israel Security Agency, August 9, 2016).



Wahid Abdullah al-Bursh (Arab Telegraph, January 5, 2017)