

The ELSC and The Rights Forum condemn Dutch government's decision to defund UAWC

The European Legal Support Center ([ELSC](#)) and [The Rights Forum](#) strongly condemn the decision of the Dutch government to end its funding to the Union of Agricultural Work Committees ([UAWC](#)). This decision was made despite an external investigation that affirmed UAWC's institutional independence and cleared the organisation of the main charges levied against it by the Israeli government and its extremist allies.

UAWC is the largest agricultural development organisation in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), [providing crucial training and supplies](#) to Palestinian farmers and fisherfolk in the West Bank and Gaza. The [organisation plays an essential role in making Area C of the West Bank liveable](#) and accessible for thousands of Palestinians farmers as well as their families and communities. Accordingly, it is undisputable that the termination of Dutch funding for UAWC's projects will have tremendous repercussions on Palestinians. It will encourage Israel's illegal settlements enterprise and facilitate Israel's *de facto* annexation of the Palestinian territory.

For years, UAWC, has been the target of [smear campaigns](#) led by a network of Israel advocacy groups claiming UAWC has institutional ties to the Popular Front of Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a Palestinian political party and a proscribed group in the European Union. These campaigns are part of a larger coordinated attack on Palestinian civil society and international organisations that provide solidarity to Palestinians which [escalated](#) in October 2021 when the Israeli Government designated UAWC and other five prominent Palestinian civil society organisations as "terror organisations". Most of these lawfare and disinformation groups [coordinate with](#) the Israeli government in some fashion and have expressed support for the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements. In a [report](#) released in October 2021, the ELSC identified 12 attempts in the Netherlands - between 2015 and 2020 - by pro-Israel advocacy groups to pressure Dutch donors (mostly the Dutch government) to defund civil society organisations supporting the Palestinian people.

The groundless nature of the allegations brought against UAWC has now been openly acknowledged by the Dutch government itself. [According to the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs](#), the findings of the Dutch investigation into UAWC confirm that there is **no evidence** that:

(a) there are any organisational links between UAWC and the PFLP;

- (b)** there are any financial links between UAWC and the PFLP;
- (c)** the PFLP directs UAWC;
- (d)** board and staff members used their position at UAWC to organise or support any terrorist activity.

However, in the Dutch Government's view, UAWC's failure to screen and select its staff and board members on the grounds of their political opinion and affiliation is considered "undesirable" and displays a "lack of candour" by the organisation. That is the sole basis put forward by the Dutch government to terminate its funding of UAWC, which started in 2007.

This decision is extremely problematic, as it starkly contradicts the essential findings of the investigation and ignores UAWC's legal obligations and internal policies to not discriminate its employees on the basis of the political views expressed outside their duties within UAWC. By doing so, the Dutch government neglects [its policy of supporting human rights defenders](#), thus enabling the efforts to repress Palestinian civil society by the Israeli Government and the disinformation groups it works with.

To protect the health of our democracies as well as any hopes for a future peace in Israel/Palestine, governments, donors, policymakers, and businesses around the world should acknowledge and firmly reject smear campaigns targeting human rights defenders.

Therefore, we:

- 1) call on civil society and solidarity groups world-wide to join and amplify the protest launched by The Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network [PNGO](#) by [sending protest letters to the Dutch Foreign Ministry MENA department](#);
- 2) urge all other donors of UAWC, both governmental and private, to maintain their funding for UAWC.