

PRESS RELEASE

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Bank of the West Illegally Seizes Funds for Refugees

In January, 2015, as infants of the homeless in Gaza were literally freezing to death from cold, the Palestine Children's Welfare Fund, a project of the tax-exempt nonprofit Association for Investment in Popular Action Committees, responded to an appeal from the Charitable Association for Palestinian Refugees (CAPR) and raised nearly \$5000 to provide blankets and healthy meals.

CAPR is a Palestine based NGO that serves Palestinian refugee populations wherever they may be, including Lebanon. It is registered with the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Interior and the Lebanese Republic, and it cooperates closely with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which serves the same populations.

On Jan. 26, the Association, based in Berkeley, California, sent the money by wire transfer from its account at Bank of the West in El Cerrito, California to CAPR. Shortly thereafter, the bank announced that they were closing all Association accounts "with or without cause" on Feb. 6. (Their letter was actually sent before we requested the transaction, so we do not think it was related.)

Then, on Feb. 2, Bank of the West informed us that BNY Mellon, the international banking firm that they use for wire transfers, was requesting additional information before completing the transaction. In view of the imminent account closures, we told them to simply cancel the transaction and return the funds to our account for later transfer from another bank.

According to Bank of the West, however, BNY Mellon refused to return the funds of the cancelled transaction without the additional information they had requested. It appears that Bank of the West and BNY Mellon are intentionally blocking funds for humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza. Worse yet, they are refusing to return our money.

According to the Association's legal counsel, Tom Nelson, this is illegal. We are exploring all options to address the banks' unacceptable actions. Members of the public who wish to help are encouraged to visit thepcwf.org and freepalestinemovement.org.

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