

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 4, 2024

International Committee of the Red Cross
19 Avenue de la Paix
1202 Geneva
Switzerland

Dear Members of the Assembly of the International Committee of the Red Cross,

We write to request you reconsider the appointment of Mr. Pierre Krahenbuhl to serve as director general of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). It is our belief that the publicly reported “credible and corroborated” allegations of mismanagement, ethical misconduct, and abuse of authority that prompted Mr. Krahenbuhl’s resignation from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in 2019 disqualify him from leading the ICRC at this pivotal moment in history.ⁱ

In December 2018, UNRWA’s ethics office shared with the UN secretary-general a confidential report describing serious acts of mismanagement and abuse of power. Allegations included “sexual misconduct, nepotism, retaliation, discrimination and other abuses, for personal gain, to suppress legitimate dissent and to otherwise achieve their personal objectives” by members of UNRWA’s senior leadership team. This team included then-Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl, who was accused of repeatedly engaging in an extra-marital affair with a subordinate while on official travel.ⁱⁱ On November 6, 2019, it was reported the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services had opened its own investigation, and, as a result of the preliminary report, the secretary-general decided to place Mr. Krahenbuhl on administrative leave.ⁱⁱⁱ Several major donors announced they would withhold funding for UNRWA pending resolution of these allegations.^{iv} Mr. Krahenbuhl resigned his position within hours of his suspension, effectively ending the inquiry.

Extending beyond the allegations of ethical misconduct leveled against Mr. Krahenbuhl, we have serious concerns about the direction UNRWA took under his leadership between 2014 to 2019. Over this period, UNRWA facilities were repeatedly used to store weapons on behalf of the U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization Hamas.^v Moreover, under Mr. Krahenbuhl’s leadership, UNRWA textbooks included anti-Semitic material that incited anti-Israeli violence.^{vi} The failure to address these incidents can be seen as a pre-cursor to the October 7th massacre, which we now know included direct participation by UNRWA employees.

The United States Congress takes these allegations and corresponding evidence extremely seriously. As the largest donor to the ICRC, we cannot stand idly by as yet another international organization falls prey to anti-Semitism and violence, let alone gross mismanagement and moral corruption. ICRC’s core humanitarian tenets, including neutrality in conflict, stand at odds with the committee’s selection for director-general.

We urge you to find a more suitable candidate to lead the ICRC during this turbulent time.

Sincerely,



JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



CHUCK GRASSLEY
United States Senator



CINDY HYDE-SMITH
United States Senator



ERIC SCHMITT
United States Senator



RICK SCOTT
United States Senator



PETE RICKETTS
United States Senator



JOHN KENNEDY
United States Senator



MIKE BRAUN
United States Senator



JOHN BOOZMAN
United States Senator



MIKE CRAPO
United States Senator



MARSHA BLACKBURN
United States Senator




STEVE DAINES
United States Senator



THOM TILLIS
United States Senator



TODD YOUNG
United States Senator



JOHN CORNYN
United States Senator



BILL CASSIDY
United States Senator



JONI ERNST
United States Senator

ⁱ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/top-unrwa-officials-accused-of-sexual-misconduct-other-serious-ethical-abuses/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/top-unrwa-officials-accused-of-sexual-misconduct-other-serious-ethical-abuses/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/probe-spurs-sidelining-of-head-of-un-agency-for-palestinians/>

^{iv} <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/06/pierre-krahenbuhl-steps-down-head-un-agency-palestinian-refugees-investigation>

^v <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/hamas-israel-attack-united-nations-unrwa-0ec8d325>

^{vi} <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/hamas-israel-attack-united-nations-unrwa-0ec8d325>