

Samaritan's Purse to play a larger role in Gaza aid delivery

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(RNS)—Franklin Graham confirmed Samaritan's Purse, the international humanitarian relief organization he heads, is ramping up its role in delivering aid to Gaza as the embattled Gaza Humanitarian Foundation is being shut down.

"I don't have all the specifics, because these details about the plan are still being developed," Graham told RNS in an Oct. 25 phone interview from Greensboro, N.C., where the organization's new Boeing 767 took off for Israel loaded with humanitarian supplies.

Graham said he understood the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation—with which Samaritan's Purse worked earlier—was being phased out.

"It's being folded," said Graham, a longtime supporter of President Trump who has served as one of his evangelical advisers. "They operate with government funding, and I think their government funding has run out. It's not going to be carried forward."

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, created by Israel and the U.S. to deliver aid in the ravaged Gaza Strip, had come under heavy criticism for its militarized distribution sites, where more than 1,000 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces as they approached the sites.

Reuters recently reported many European nations were opposed to the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation having any future role in Gaza.

‘Asked to pause operations’

Gaza Humanitarian Foundation spokesperson Chapin Fay responded in an email, “GHF was asked to pause operations during the hostage release phase which is still ongoing.”

The group, which began delivering aid to Gaza in March, ceased operations since the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas was signed nearly two weeks ago.

While acknowledging the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation was being paused, Fay did not say the organization is shuttering.

“While the situation remains fluid on the ground, GHF has been instructed to remain ready to re-engage and specifically not to take any actions that would preclude us from resuming operations immediately,” Fay said.

Johnnie Moore, the evangelical PR guru who has served as Gaza Humanitarian Foundation chairman, recently stepped down.

Delicate ceasefire in place

The fragile ceasefire deal—brokered by the United States, Qatari and Egyptian mediators—has been strained by violent flare-ups and tensions over the exchange of deceased Israeli captives.

All the living captives have been returned to Israel, and Israel has released some 2,000 imprisoned Palestinians.

The Gaza Strip remains in ruins after a devastating two-year campaign that damaged or destroyed 90 percent of buildings, razing hospitals, universities, mosques and water and sewage plants. Israel has killed more than 68,000 people, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, and thousands

of corpses remain buried under the rubble.

The Gaza ceasefire plan names the United Nations, the Red Crescent and other international institutions as the entities responsible to deliver aid to some 2 million Palestinians.

Immediately following the ceasefire, Israel allowed more aid to enter Gaza, where a global hunger monitor warned in August that famine had taken hold. But that aid has since been restricted in the wake of ongoing clashes.

‘Don’t like to be tethered to incompetence’

Samaritan’s Purse would prefer not to work with the United Nations to deliver aid, Graham said.



Franklin Graham speaks in Israel on Jan. 23, 2024. (Photo courtesy of Samaritan’s Purse)

“If we have to, we can work with anybody,” he said. “But they have such a bureaucratic organization, it just really slows you down. We don’t like to be tethered to incompetence.”

On Saturday, Graham prayed with the aviation team before it took off. The new Boeing 767 airlift, which was carrying 290,000 packets of Ready-to-use Supplementary Food, used to treat acute malnutrition, as well as blankets and solar lights, was due to land at Israel’s Ben Gurion Airport later Saturday.

It was not clear how the supplies would be delivered to Gaza.

In the wake of the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people, Samaritan's Purse began assisting Israel's recovery, as well. It donated 42 ambulances and is building nine community centers and bomb shelters in the north of the country.

Samaritan's Purse has also deepened its relationships with the Israeli government and is now working with the U.S. State Department to assist Gaza in a larger way.

The faith-based operation, one of the U.S.'s largest humanitarian relief organizations, also benefits from its close ties to U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, a former Southern Baptist pastor. Graham said Huckabee's wife, Janet, is a longtime volunteer with Samaritan's Purse.

Graham confirmed all the aid donated to Gaza was privately funded. However, he said, Samaritan's Purse would be open to accepting government funds.

It also is considering building an emergency field hospital in Gaza, a service in which it has developed unique expertise. In the past, it has erected temporary hospitals in Ukraine, Sudan and Myanmar, among other hotspots.