

102 Episcopal bishops ask Obama for continued aid to Middle East hospital

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c. 2012 Religion News Service WASHINGTON (RNS) A group of Episcopal bishops is asking President Obama to help assure that a United Nations agency continues to support a diocese-run hospital in the Gaza Strip.

In a Wednesday (June 6) letter, the 102 bishops ask the president to support funding for Al Ahli Hospital from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. The letter asserts funding was cut off in May, though an UNRWA official said a final decision has not been made.

The hospital, run by the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, "is the only facility of its sort in the Gaza Strip that is not run by the Hamas government and as such, it is able to provide care without any outside interference or political calculation," the letter states.

Al Ahli's 120-member staff serves 4,800 inpatients and 42,000 outpatients annually, most of whom are Muslim. In the past, UNRWA provided nearly \$1 million of the hospital's annual \$2.4 million operating budget.

Under U.N. policies, humanitarian organizations bid for funds, and this year, a number of new organizations qualify to bid. UNRWA is in the process of reviewing these bids, so it is undetermined as to whether Al Ahli will continue to receive funding, the UNRWA official said.

He added that UNRWA has worked close with the church and appreciates its services during the last few years.

Requests for comment from the White House and Episcopal Church were not immediately returned.