

U.S. funding cuts hurt Lutheran hospital, many services for Palestinians

Augusta Victoria Hospital is among six East Jerusalem hospitals in financial dire straits.

by Lutheran World Federation, [Christian Century staff](#), and [The Christian Science Monitor](#) in the [October 10, 2018](#) issue

A Lutheran World Federation hospital in East Jerusalem is one of six that will be affected by cuts to U.S. funding reported by media in early September.

Augusta Victoria Hospital serves all Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and offers specialized care not available in other hospitals in the area, including radiation therapy for cancer patients and pediatric hemodialysis.

According to a budget approved by the U.S. Congress, the six hospitals in East Jerusalem, including Augusta Victoria Hospital, would have received \$25 million this year to cover costs for patients referred by the Palestinian Ministry of Health. The State Department said only that it was redirecting the funds, the Associated Press reported.

The news reports followed a policy review by the U.S. administration that resulted in several funding cuts affecting people in the West Bank and Gaza.

“We have strong support from the churches and the people of the United States. Collectively, we will continue to work hard to regain the U.S. government support,” said Martin Junge, LWF general secretary.

Pauliina Parhiala, LWF country representative in Jerusalem, wrote that they had assessed the financial situation of the hospitals as unsustainable: “Accumulating unpaid bills has driven some of the hospitals to inability to pay suppliers and basic services which they need to sustain stable level of services. Delays in payments have made the cashflow management difficult to all, including Augusta Victoria Hospital.”

In March 2018, Congress passed the Taylor Force Act to strengthen restrictions on aid to the Palestinian Authority in annual appropriations. A specific exemption was made to protect funding to the six East Jerusalem hospitals.

[Dave Harden](#), a former U.S. Agency for International Development administrator in the Middle East, criticized the Trump administration for promoting its efforts to help Christians in the region while defunding Christian hospitals in East Jerusalem.

“Augusta Victoria Hospital is on the edge of bankruptcy,” he wrote on social media, while St. John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital is also under “severe stress.”

Reports of cuts to hospital funding came several days after the Trump administration decided to stop \$300 million in support for UNRWA, the UN relief agency for Palestinian refugees.

Despite recent pledges from the Gulf nations and China, UNRWA still faces a \$217 million gap in its \$1.2 billion budget for 2018, threatening its services to 5 million registered Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

In Zarqa Camp in Jordan, where more than 25,000 people live on one-tenth of a square mile, trash has been piling up since March, when UNRWA was forced to lay off most of its part-time street cleaners and sanitation workers following an initial round of U.S. funding cuts.

UNRWA said if it doesn't receive the \$217 million, it will have to close its schools and health centers in coming weeks.

“Schools are the only thing children have here, and it is our only hope of lifting ourselves up from the camp,” said Ahmed Ibrahim, a camp resident. “If the agency closes the schools, our future will be lost.”

A version of this article, which was edited September 25, appears in the print edition under the title “In Albania, new mosque financed by Turkey stirs old resentments.”