

Date: Wed, 5 Dec 2007

URGENT PETITION to END THE HEALTH CRISIS IN GAZA

Appeal - Appeal - Appeal

We have a very serious shortage of diesel in the ministry of Health the majority of the 11 hospitals of MOH do suffer from a shortage of fuel, the same is for the 52 primary health care clinics and vehicles. I am not speaking now about the consequences but they are catastrophic and include the transportation defect which will not enable the employees of the Ministry to go to their hospitals. Please. We urge you to help us by applying any sort of pressure that could let the Israelis change their mind about this fatal action that would threaten the lives of thousands of civilians in the already under siege Gaza.

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URGENT PETITION to END THE HEALTH CRISIS IN GAZA

Since Israeli government declared Gaza as "hostile entity" on 19th September 2007, Israel blocks delivery of essential medicines to Gaza Strip and doesn't allow Palestinian patients to go outside of Gaza for urgent treatment.

The United Nations, The World Health Organisation and Physicians for Human Rights have condemned Israel for this situation, but Israeli government is still continue to its policy and Palestinian patients are slowly dying in front of the world.

All the victims of this humanitarian crisis are innocent civilians, and many of them are children. For example in 14th November 2007, 6 months old Palestinian baby Sina al-Hajj died because Israeli government didn't allow her to cross Gaza border for getting treatment. Palestinian MP Jamal Al Khudari said now there are more than a thousand Palestinian patients in urgent need of treatment who are not allowed to leave Gaza.

Please sign this petition to call the United Nations and the Israeli government to allow the Palestinian patients having treatment outside of Gaza: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/save-gaza>

Coalition of Women for Peace cwp@coalitionofwomen.org <http://www.coalitionofwomen.org>

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Diaries: Live from Palestine

"A matter of revenge": Israel denying medical treatment to Gaza

<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article9114.shtml>

Rami Almeghari, *Live from Palestine*, 22 November 2007

"We had been waiting for an urgent referral to an outside hospital for the past six days, until he died today," said Dr. Ismail Yassin Monday, in response to the death of one more patient at the

Gaza Children's Hospital.

Tamer al-Yazji, a 12-year-old chicken pox patient, died on Monday on his hospital bed after his referral to an Israeli hospital had been delayed.

Dr. Yassin explained that Tamer's condition had gotten worse over the past few weeks, showing symptoms of blood problems in his brain, so the ill-equipped hospital requested his urgent referral for an MRI scan and follow-up, which meant accessing medical care facilities in Israel or Egypt.

Working in less than ideal conditions with fuel supplies cut and medicine not entering the strip, Gaza Children's Hospital is currently hospitalizing a number of patients, including many infants and 10 cases of cardiac disease patients.

Director of the hospital's infant intensive care unit, Dr. Shirin Abed, said that her unit provides care to a number of infants who are in bad need of medication.

Ahmad Abu Nada, a 21-day-old infant, Dr. Abed said, has been suffering from poor suckling since was born and that his condition is getting much worse.

"This baby's condition has been deteriorating and unless he is referred for [outside] medical care, his brain could be damaged in the course of few days or few weeks, so we ask for help. We filed a request to the concerned authorities for his referral, yet we have not received any response," she stated.

According to the health care workers at the hospital, usually the Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza determines to where a patient will be referred: either to the Israeli Hadasah hospital or to the Palestinian-run al-Maqased hospital in East Jerusalem.

Now that the Hamas government has been in complete control of the Gaza Strip since June, the processing of such medical care transfer requests is taking longer than ever.

Earlier this month, a breast cancer patient died as her entry to Israel for treatment was delayed.

According to hospital officials, Gaza hospitals in general lack basic equipment such as MRI scanners or dialysis machines; therefore, many cases are being referred to outside Gaza every month.

In addition to the delay of access of Gaza patients to outside hospitals, mainly Israeli ones, the internal Israeli intelligence agency, the Shabak (Shin Bet) is reportedly pressuring applicants to give information in exchange for permission.

"Upon arrival at the Erez crossing in northern Gaza, the Shabak officers start interrogating patients, demanding them to give the Shabak information about friends and neighbors. When a patient refuses to give such information, the Shabak sends him back to Gaza," explained Miri Weingarten of Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHR), based in Tel Aviv.

Weingarten said that PHR had filed a petition to the Israeli high court requesting three demands: allowing treatment for 11 patients enlisted in the petition, allowing all those in need for referral outside Gaza to travel and stopping the Israeli Shabak's interrogation of Gaza patients who cross the Erez checkpoint.

"Among the eleven patients we requested for their entry, was Na'el al-Kordi, 21, who died early

this week after having been denied access, while four others got the permission, with only two of them managing to enter the Erez checkpoint," Weingarten added.

Neither the Israeli government, nor the Israeli high court, has yet responded to PHR's petition or to any other appeals by various local and international bodies to allow smooth access of Gaza patients to treatment outside Gaza.

According to PHR, Israel delays the access of 40 patients every month, thus causing death or deterioration of health condition in many cases.

In September, Israel declared Gaza a "hostile entity," stepping up attacks on the coastal strip and cutting large quantities of fuel supplies to the 1.4-million-strong population which is dependant on Israel for many basic needs, from water to medication.

Israel cites security reasons for all its actions against the Gaza Strip, namely preventing Palestinian resistance factions from firing homemade rockets onto nearby Israeli towns.

However, in the words of Weingarten, "It is not a matter of security, it's rather a matter of revenge."

Rami Almeghari is currently contributor to several media outlets including the Palestine Chronicle, aljazeera.info, IMEMC, The Electronic Intifada and Free Speech Radio News. Rami is also a former senior English translator at and editor in chief of the international press center of the Gaza-based Palestinian Information Service. He can be contacted at rami_almeghari at hotmail.com.

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Human Rights

Gaza's medical sector suffers Israeli sanctions, restrictions

Report, *The Electronic Intifada*, 6 December 2007

<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article9148.shtml>

JERUSALEM/GAZA, 5 December (IRIN) - Health officials in the Gaza Strip say they are concerned about hundreds of patients unable to travel to Israel or other countries for vital treatment, and that local hospitals lack essential medical equipment, drugs and fuel.

Only about one in seven patients who used to travel through the Rafah terminal to Egypt for treatment are now able to access medical care in Israel, according to World Health Organization (WHO) statistics.

Since June, when Hamas took over in Gaza, 17 percent of all patients who applied for permits to enter Israel were denied entry, mostly on "security grounds." In October the figure rose to 23 percent.

"There is a trend that it is getting tougher to get out of Gaza for treatment," said Mahmoud Daher of the WHO in Gaza.

Following the Hamas takeover, tight Israeli sanctions were placed on all travel to and from the strip, in addition to restrictions on imports and a near total ban on exports.

"The cases of patients waiting for treatment will just get more difficult," Bassam al-Badri of the referral department at the ministry of health in Gaza, told IRIN. "Some of them will have to have unnecessary amputations. Already some people are in the intensive care unit because they didn't get treated."

At least 13 people who completed the permit application process died in the past two months waiting for treatment, according to health organizations. Another 15 or so died while still applying, according to the Gaza ministry of health.

One was Na'el al Kurdi, a cancer patient who died in Gaza in November at the age of 21. Before June he was treated in Egypt, but after that he was unable to access care in Israel, due to "security reasons."

"I was very sad and worried when he was dying here in our home in front of my eyes, while we could not do anything," Umm Rami, his mother, told IRIN. "In the last two weeks, he barely drank water."

According to Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHR), the closure of Rafah means that many people suspected of being a security risk are no longer able to access any care. "Our minimum demand is that Israel ensures access for all patients who need treatment outside Gaza," said Miri Weingarten of PHR.

Dwindling medical supplies

Supplies of 91 out of 416 essential drugs have run out, as have about a third of essential medical supplies, according to the Gaza ministry of health and the WHO. For example, most children's antibiotics have run out.

Also, some 3,600 chronic psychiatric patients have had their treatment stopped, as over half of the needed medicines are no longer available, according to the UN Children's Fund and WHO statistics published by the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The difficulties procuring medicines are largely related to the fiscal problems of the Palestinian Authority (PA) due to the international financial sanctions placed on the PA following the Hamas election victory in early 2006, and which were lifted in June, after the formation of a new government without the Islamic group.

Meanwhile, diagnostic equipment in the public sector is in need of spare parts, forcing Gaza's impoverished population to turn to expensive private clinics. Similarly, the WHO reported, seven out of Gaza's 17 incubators are not functioning properly.

Fuel reductions being felt

Israel's fuel reductions have started to impact the health sector.

"Ministry cars lack petrol," said Mu'awia Hassanien, the director of emergency services at Gaza's ministry of health, noting that mobile health units were affected.

"We have a shortage of 60-70 percent in the diesel for power generators, and the electricity goes off so much these days," he added. Officials are concerned about refrigeration and intensive care units, should the power be shut off in the coming days.

According to UN OCHA, the amount of diesel and benzene that reached Gaza in November was less than half the amount needed.

"If the fuel is not delivered as soon as possible, the vital services of the health sector will be affected," Hassanien told IRIN.

Petrol stations in Gaza began to run out of product to sell due to the sanctions; the association of petrol station owners stopped importing fuel altogether on 27 November, in protest.

"We don't want to cooperate with this decision harming our people," Mahmoud al-Khozondar from the association said.

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