

PUBLIC

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Further Information on: UA 182/07 (MDE 15/048/2007, 11 July 2007) Health Concern

**ISRAEL/
OCCUPIED**

**PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES/
EGYPT**

Thousands of Palestinian civilians

The population of the Gaza Strip - 1.5 million Palestinians - has been unable to leave the Gaza Strip since 9 June 2007, when Israel closed the Rafah Crossing between Gaza and Egypt, the only gate to the outside world.

Those affected include patients in need of medical treatment which is not available in Gaza's hospitals, which lack the specialized personnel and equipment to treat a range of conditions such as cancer, cardio-vascular illnesses, complex surgeries and other emergencies. Hospitals and medical facilities are also increasingly suffering from a shortage of drugs and disposable supplies. This has further reduced their already limited resources. Whereas leaving the Gaza Strip was previously difficult most of the time, it is now totally impossible, and a growing number of patients are missing potentially life-saving medical treatment abroad.

Prior to the closure of the Gaza-Egypt border every month several hundreds of Palestinian inhabitants of the Gaza Strip used to receive medical treatment or undergo surgery (paid by the Palestinian Authorities, PA) in Egyptian hospitals/medical facilities. A smaller number of patients was sent to other countries (via Egypt), or to Israel - subject to them receiving "security" clearance from the Israeli army allowing them to enter Israel.

Since 9 June, only the most urgent medical cases have been allowed by the Israeli authorities to leave the Gaza Strip to go to hospitals in Israel. This has often happened after legal battles and threat of court proceedings by Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations. In some cases, the patients died before they could receive the necessary permits from the Israeli authorities. Other patients who died had been refused passage into Israel on the basis that they were considered as a "security threat".

Muhammad Mourtuga, a 19 year old Gazan suffering for a malignant brain tumour, was denied permission to cross into Israel for medical treatment. Although the Israeli authorities later reviewed their decision and granted him a permit on 1 July 2007, he died shortly before his passage from Gaza to Israel could be arranged.

In addition to those in need of medical care, many of Gaza's residents need to leave Gaza to undertake activities linked to their work or study abroad, or to visit relatives. Thousands of students and others who are temporarily living abroad and who were intending to visit their families in Gaza have been unable to do so.

Some 6,000 Gazans who were outside Gaza when the Rafah Crossing was closed on 9 June, were stuck on the Egyptian side of the Crossing for up to two months. Only in recent days did the Israeli army allow them to return to Gaza, but only via a long detour into Israel. However, dozens of other Gazans are still stranded in Egypt, unable to return home because they fear that if they pass through Israeli territory they risk being arrested by Israeli forces. Among them are sick and disabled people, who had travelled abroad for medical care and who are now finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the poor living conditions and without assistance from their families.

In addition, Gaza's merchandise crossings remain mostly closed. Israel only allows the passage of emergency supplies but prevents most imports and exports in/out of Gaza. On 9 August, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), warned: "Gaza risks becoming a virtually one hundred per cent aid dependent", and urged that the crossings in and out of Gaza be re-opened to allow for imports and exports which are crucial for the survival of the Palestinian economy. UNRWA warned that if the closure continues at least 120,000 workers Gaza will lose their jobs, and that in the construction sector alone, about 160 million dollars worth of projects have been halted, including UNRWA, UNDP and other projects. It also expressed concern about the risks for the agricultural sector. (see: <http://www.un.org/unrwa/news/releases/pr-2007/Gaza9Aug07.pdf>).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Under the Agreement of Movement and Access signed by Israeli and the PA in November 2005, a European Union Border Assistance Mission (EU BAM) was mandated to supervise the Rafah Crossing. Israel, however, retained the authority to close the border and it has often done so for prolonged periods, especially since early 2006 (when Hamas, the Islamist Resistance Movement, was elected and formed a PA government). The Israeli authorities totally closed the Rafah crossing on 9 June 2007, when armed clashes erupted between members of Hamas and members of PA President Abbas' Fatah party. The crossing has remained closed ever since, as Israel refuses to deal with Hamas, which has since become the *de-facto* administration in the Gaza Strip. The closure of Rafah has effectively sealed off the Gaza Strip.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Hebrew, English or your own language:

- expressing concern that hundreds of inhabitants of the Gaza Strip are prevented from going abroad to receive the necessary medical treatment which is not available to them in the Gaza Strip, due to the closure of the Rafah crossing.
- expressing concern that, some ill or disabled Gazans remain stranded on the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing and unable to return to Gaza because they fear that they may be arrested by Israeli forces if they are forced to pass through Israeli territory on their way back to Gaza.
- calling on all concerned parties to spare no effort to facilitate for the passage of persons – especially those in need of medical care - and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip, on an efficient and permanent basis, prioritising the human rights of the Palestinian residents of Gaza over political gain.
- Pointing out to the Israeli authorities that According to international law, Israel, as the occupying power in the Gaza Strip, should ensure that the residents of the Gaza Strip have access to medical care to the same extent as nationals of the State of Israel.

APPEALS TO:

Ehud Olmert

Prime Minister of Israel

Office of the Prime Minister, 3 Kaplan Street, P O Box 187, Kiryat Ben-Gurion, Jerusalem 91919, Israel

Fax: +972 2 566 4838

Email: rohm@pmo.gov.il

(Message from UA team, 21/08/07: "Please note that the email address you have for the Israeli Prime Minister does not appear to be working. Please use this one instead: pm_eng@pmo.gov.il ")

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Mahmoud Abbas

President of the Palestinian Authority

Fax: +972 2 296 3170/296 3179

Salutation: Dear President

Ismail Haniyeh

Hamas leadership in Gaza

Fax: + 970 8 282 2159/ 284 5040/ 286 8971

Salutation: Dear Mr Haniyeh

H.E. Muhammad Hosni Mubarak

President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 'Abedine Palace, Cairo, Egypt

Fax: +20 22 390 1998

Email: webmaster@presidency.gov.eg

Salutation: Dear President

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Israel and the Palestinian Authority accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 September 2007. *****