

PUBLIC

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Further information on UA 284/08 (AI Index: MDE 15/041/08, 16 October 2008) - Medical Concern

**ISRAEL/OCCUPIED
PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

**Ahmed Nahid Mohsin (m), aged 1 year 5 months
Hamza Hassan Abu Habel (m), aged 1 year 2 months**

New names:

**Mohammed Odeh Thabet (m), aged 17 years
Yousef Rami Abu Latifa (m), aged 3 Years 5 months
Nour Mohammed al-Jarou (m), aged 5 months**

Now receiving treatment outside Gaza: Soheb Wael Alqasas (m), aged 5 years

**Sami Atwa Abu Ishaq (m), aged 5 months
Ahmed Talat Abu Omar (m), aged 6 years
Mohammed Ashraf Abu Ajwah (m), aged 1 year 2 months**

The children named above suffer from congenital heart diseases, including conditions commonly known as holes in the heart. They need urgent surgery that cannot be provided in Gaza, where necessary medical facilities and specialists are not available. These are however available at a hospital in East Jerusalem, only an hour's drive from Gaza.

However, five of the children named above (Ahmed Nahid Mohsin, Hamza Hassan Abu Habel, Mohammed Odeh Thabet, Yousef Rami Abu Latifa and Nour Mohammed al-Jarou) have so far not been able to leave Gaza because the Israeli authorities have refused to grant permission for the children's mothers and or grandmothers to accompany them to the hospital in East Jerusalem.

A team of Italian heart specialists is currently conducting a week of paediatric cardiac surgery at the Makassad Hospital in East Jerusalem and the children were scheduled to undergo surgery this week. It is imperative that the children are able to travel from Gaza to the hospital as soon as possible, so that they can still be operated on by the visiting team of heart specialists. For this to be possible their companions must be allowed to travel with them.

Some of the children have already waited for weeks and months for the treatment they badly need. Ahmed Nahid Mohsin and Hamza Hassan Abu Habel previously missed the opportunity to have their operation at the beginning of October, when a team of British heart specialists carried out a week of paediatric surgery at Makassad Hospital. They and Soheb Wael Alqasas, Sami Atwa Abu Ishaq, Ahmed Talat Abu Omar, and Mohammed Ashraf Abu Ajwah were scheduled to undergo surgery then, but could not because their mothers and grandmothers were refused passage out of Gaza by the Israeli authorities.

Soheb Wael Alqasas, Sami Atwa Abu Ishaq, Ahmed Talat Abu Omar, Mohammed Ashraf Abu Ajwah and 11 other children suffering from similar conditions were allowed to travel from Gaza to the hospital in East Jerusalem in the first days of November. Soheb Wael Alqasas had previously missed six appointments for his surgery.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Medical facilities in Gaza lack the specialized staff and equipment to treat a range of conditions, including cardiovascular illnesses and cancer. Israel, as the occupying power, is required under international law to ensure that Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank have access to the same level of medical provision and hospital treatment as they provide to Israeli nationals. The blockade of Gaza and the refusal to allow patients to leave the Gaza Strip to obtain medical treatment which is not available there, constitutes collective punishment which is prohibited under international humanitarian law.

The Israeli authorities control the Gaza Strip's borders and often refuse to allow critically ill patients to leave for medical treatment which is not available in Gaza. Sometimes no answer is given to the request, but in most cases permission is refused on "security" grounds. However, the Israeli authorities do not ever provide any evidence or information to substantiate their allegations that these patients are a "security threat" – making it impossible for the patients to challenge the allegations. Some of the patients who have been refused passage out of Gaza were in a critical condition and unable to move. As well, on 8 October 2008 the Israeli authorities refused permission to enter Gaza to an Israeli medical team, who were to carry out operations and medical consultations and provide training on trauma and post-traumatic treatment over three days. Also in October the Israeli army refused entry to Gaza to 80 foreign mental health and health care professionals to attend a mental health conference organized by the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Israeli army imposed a siege on the Gaza Strip in June 2007 when Hamas took over the Palestinian security forces there. Israel closed Gaza's main gate to the outside world, the Gaza-Egypt border which is only allowed to open on rare occasions for exceptional "humanitarian" cases. The only other passage out of Gaza, the Erez crossing with Israel, is closed to Palestinians except for exceptional medical or "humanitarian" cases.

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

- expressing grave concern that critically ill children (list the names above) have not been able to leave Gaza to access potentially life-saving treatment in Jerusalem;
- pointing out that under international law, Israel, as the occupying power, has the responsibility to ensure that the population of Gaza has access to medical care to the same extent as Israeli nationals.

APPEALS TO:

Shimon Peres
President of the State of Israel
The Office of the President
3 Hanassi Street
Jerusalem 92188, Israel

Fax: +972 2 561 1033
+972 2 566 4838

Email: public@president.gov.il OR president@president.gov.il

Salutation: Dear President

Ehud Barak
Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
37 Kaplan Street
Hakirya,
Tel Aviv 61909, Israel

Fax: +972 3 691 6940
Email: minister@mod.gov.il

Salutation: Dear Minister

Yacov Ben Yizri

Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
2 Ben Tabai Street
PO Box 1176
Jerusalem 91010, Israel

Fax: +972 2 678 7662
+972 2 623 3026

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Israel accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 19 December 2008.