

PUBLIC

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Medical Concern

**ISRAEL/OCCUPIED
PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**

**Sami Atwa Abu Ishaq (m), aged 5 months
Ahmed Nahid Mohsin (m), aged 1.5 years
Soheb Wael Alqasas (m), aged 5 years
Hamza Hassan Abu Habel (m), aged 1.2 years
Ahmed Talat Abu Omar (m), aged 6 years
Mohammed Ashraf Abu Ajwah (m), aged 1.2 years**

The children named above suffer from serious heart conditions including congenital heart defects commonly known as holes in the heart. All the children need urgent surgery that cannot be provided in Gaza, which lacks both the necessary medical facilities and specialists. The children were due to be operated on by a team of British heart specialists at Makassad Hospital in East Jerusalem during the week beginning 4 October 2008. They were not able to leave the Gaza Strip because the Israeli authorities refused permissions to their mothers/grandmothers to leave Gaza to accompany them. Soheb Wael Alqasas has already missed six appointments for his surgery in recent months because his mother and grandmother were repeatedly refused permits to accompany him to the hospital in Jerusalem.

A team of Italian heart specialists will be conducting a week of paediatric cardiac surgery at the Makassad Hospital from 6 November. It is imperative that the six children are able to attend the Makassad Hospital in time to undergo surgery by the visiting team of specialists. For this to be possible their relatives must be allowed to travel with them to the hospital in Jerusalem.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Medical facilities in Gaza lack the specialized staff and equipment to treat a range of conditions, including cardiovascular illnesses and cancer. Israel 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, unobtainable in Gaza, 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.

The Israeli army imposed a siege on the Gaza Strip in June 2007 when Hamas took over the Palestinian security forces there. The Israeli authorities 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 all Gazans except for exceptional medical or other "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 six 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
president@president.gov.il
Salutation: Dear President

Ehud Barak
Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
37 Kaplan Street
Hakiryia,
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 27 November 2008.

