

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 Palestinians civilians

Due to growing Israeli restrictions the number Palestinians allowed to leave Gaza for medical treatment elsewhere, has been significantly reduced. Several have died or suffered irreparable or long-term damage. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), fewer than five patients a day were allowed to leave Gaza in September, down from 40 in July.

To illustrate the trend: 21-year-old Mahmoud Abu Taha urgently needs treatment for cancer of the small intestine. The limited treatment available in Gaza has been unsuccessful. His family told Amnesty International that Mahmoud has lost a third of his body weight and is no longer able to move his limbs. He cannot eat and the vitamin solution feeds have been cut down to just one a day because the product is in short supply. He was given a permit by the Israeli army to leave Gaza but on 18 October, after a long wait at the Erez crossing, the Israeli army refused to let him pass. Efforts by his family and by local human rights organizations have been in vain.

On 23 October, 75-year-old Nimr Mohammed Salim Shuhaiber was the last patient to die while waiting to leave Gaza to receive treatment for an acute heart attack suffered two days earlier. His family told Amnesty International that he first received a permit to leave Gaza on 22 October, but on arrival at the Erez Crossing the ambulance was sent back by the Israeli soldiers. He returned to the crossing the following morning, having received clearance from the Israeli army, but died after a five-hour wait. His family believe that his life could have been saved, if he had been able to leave Gaza and access the necessary medical treatment.

The Israeli army routinely prevents critically ill and wounded patients from leaving Gaza citing unspecified 'security' reasons. Such restrictions, though common for several years, have reached an unprecedented level in recent months, notably since Hamas' takeover in Gaza last June. Denying passage to patients in desperate need of medical care does not serve any legitimate security purpose – as patients undergo strict security checks at the crossing, and are generally in dire medical conditions. Rather, such measures appear to be in retaliation for rockets attacks launched by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza into southern Israel.

In June the Israeli authorities denied an exit permit to 25-year-old Alaa 'Odeh, who needed emergency treatment after getting shot in both legs during interfactional armed clashes, on "security" grounds. He was unable to get the necessary treatment in Gaza, and his right leg had to be amputated. A new request for a permit for Alaa to leave Gaza was again refused and shortly afterwards his other leg had to also be amputated.

On several occasions patients who were denied permits to leave Gaza on "security" grounds were eventually allowed to leave Gaza after Israeli human rights NGOs threatened to take the cases to the Supreme Court. However, there are many more patients who are not allowed to leave Gaza.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.5 million Palestinians remain trapped in Gaza following the total closure of Gaza's main gate to the outside world - the Rafah Crossing point to Egypt – by Israel on 9 June 2007. Only a handful of Palestinians have

since been permitted to leave Gaza, exceptionally, via Israel (via the Erez crossing – used almost exclusively by foreign journalists and humanitarian workers but closed to Palestinians, except very rare exceptions).

Medical facilities in Gaza 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 as a result of the blockades imposed by Israel on Gaza's imports. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 61 drug items (13% of the essential drug list [EDL]) are out of stock, and the stock is low for another 125 items (26% of the EDL).

Under international law, Israel, as the occupying power, is prohibited from imposing collective punishment or reprisals on the Palestinian population and must ensure that the residents of the Gaza Strip have access to the necessary medical care. .

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

TO THE ISRAELI AUTHORITIES:

- expressing grave concern that patients are routinely prevented from leaving the Gaza Strip to travel to West Bank, to Israel or abroad to receive the necessary medical treatment, and that such denial puts their lives and health in danger;
- noting that as a result of the blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip since 9 June 2007, the entire population of Gaza – 1.5 million people - is now trapped in Gaza, where certain medical assistance is not available to them;
- pointing out to the Israeli authorities that according to international law, Israel, as the occupying power in the Gaza Strip, must ensure that the residents of the Gaza Strip have access to the necessary medical care, as well as to medical care to the same extent as nationals of the State of Israel.

Tzipi Livni (Mrs)
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
9 Yitzhak Rabin Boulevard; Kiryat Ben-Gurion
Jerusalem 91035, Israel

Fax: + 972 2 530 3367
Email: sar@mfa.gov.il
Salutation: Dear Minister

Brigadier General Avihai Mandelblit
Judge Advocate General
6 David Elazar Street; Hakirya
Tel Aviv, Israel

Fax: + 972 3 608 0366
Email: c/o arbel@mail.idf.il
Salutation: Dear Brigadier General

TO PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY (PA) AND TO EGYPT:

- calling on the authorities to ensure that all the residents of the Gaza Strip, and notably patients in need of medical care, are allowed to leave and return to Gaza;
- calling on the PA Prime Minister and the Egyptian President to spare no efforts to work for the reopening of the Rafah crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, which is the only gate to the outside world for the population of Gaza.

Mahmoud Abbas
President of the Palestinian Authority
Fax: +972 2 296 3170/296 3179
Salutation: Dear President

His Excellency Mohammad Hosni Mubarak
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt

'Abedine Palace
Cairo, Egypt

Fax: +20223901998

Salutation: Your Excellency

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

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 7 December 2007.