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Health and Humanitarian Organizations Call for a Ceasefire

As health and humanitarian organizations witnessing the public health and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, we call for an immediate ceasefire, the speedy release of hostages and the provision of long-term safety for all inhabitants in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory through negotiated solutions and international action.

The ongoing bombings, fuel, water, and electricity blockade in Gaza have given rise to an unprecedented public health and humanitarian crisis. Over 11,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israel's aerial attacks, of which 4,500 are children and 2,000 people reported as missing, of which roughly 1,500 are children. Furthermore, 1.5 million individuals have been internally displaced, and at least 62 medical facilities, including 22 hospitals, were damaged, and another 24 hospitals were forcibly evacuated.

Gaza's health system, already strained pre-war by the ongoing Israeli blockade and freedom of movement restrictions, now faces overwhelming challenges. Israeli policies since October 7th have resulted in over 24,000 wounded, displaced medical professionals and minimal staffing for hospitals as well as critical shortages of anesthesia, antibiotics, and painkillers.

The blackout enforced by Israel has led to the shutdown of one-third of Gaza's hospitals and two-thirds of primary health clinics due to fuel shortages. This dire situation means that critical patients, including many babies in incubators and individuals on ventilators, as well as those requiring dialysis, are unable to receive necessary treatment. In Al Shifa hospital, this, together with damage done by the Israeli military to the hospital's generator, reportedly resulted in the death of three premature babies and at least 30 other individuals.

Meanwhile, the approximately 2,000 Palestinian patients per month who are regularly forced to exit Gaza for medical care that is not available in the Strip, are no longer able to do so. Tragically, reports have detailed the recent deaths of four cancer patients who were unable to access their medical treatment outside of the Strip due to Israel's closure.

So far, Israel has ordered 24 hospitals in Northern Gaza to evacuate, impacting more than 2,000 inpatients, including newborn babies in incubators, oncology patients and critically ill patients on life support. These hospitals often serve as the sole safe haven for tens of thousands of internally displaced families. Such calls for evacuation are contrary to international law and medical ethics and as noted by the World Health Organization Chief “it is impossible to evacuate hospitals full of patients without endangering their lives”. Reports have recently emerged that Israel has targeted the area surrounding al Shifa hospital and other hospitals, as well as the hospitals themselves — while Israel has argued that it is targeting Hamas infrastructure and headquarters— these attacks prevent the sick and wounded from accessing medical care and places patients and medical staff in an impossible situation.

From a public health perspective, there is a concern regarding the rise of diseases, due to the inadequate access to water and sanitation services and poor sanitation conditions, including for the many wounded, as well as the many bodies, both under rubble and e.g. in al Shifa hospital. Moreover, Gaza’s extreme food insecurity poses a malnutrition risk for pregnant and lactating women and increases the risk of maternal nutrition-related illnesses for Gaza’s roughly 50,000 pregnant women.

Given these dire circumstances, it is imperative that the international community intervenes promptly to safeguard the civilian population in both Israel and Gaza. We urgently call for an immediate ceasefire and the immediate release of all hostages held in Gaza. Meanwhile, healthcare and rescue workers, patients and medical facilities must receive protection and assistance in their mission to save lives. As humanitarian and health organizations we recognize that a ceasefire and a negotiated solution is essential for the immediate return of the Israeli and foreign abductees and to ultimately ensure the safety of all Israelis and Palestinians.

Signatories:

European Federation of Nurses Associations

Harvard Humanitarian Initiative

International Child Health Group

IFHHRO | Medical Human Rights Network

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