

Call for Intervention Before It Is Too Late: PCHR Warns that Gaza's Healthcare System Would Collapse in Case of Coronavirus Outbreak

By [Palestinian Centre for Human Rights](#)

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The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) follows up with concern the healthcare situation in the Gaza Strip and seriously warns of a catastrophic deterioration that would strike the health care sector in the case of a Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. PCHR is concerned over the healthcare system's inability to respond to the needs of patients if an outbreak occurs.

According to PCHR's follow-up, the healthcare facilities in Gaza are already on the verge of collapse due to the Israeli-imposed closure on the Gaza Strip for the last 13 years, exacerbated by the repercussions of the Palestinian internal division and political bickering. All of this has caused a fragile healthcare system in the Gaza Strip, a perpetual shortage of essential drugs and medical devices and insufficient number of specialized health professionals; rendering the system unable to meet the basic medical needs of the Gaza Strip population in normal times.

According to the Ministry of Health (MOH) in Gaza, the Israeli closure barred MOH from importing new medical devices or spare parts for malfunctioning ones. The crisis of medical devices shortage imposes a major obstacle for the development and sustainability of the Gaza hospitals and medical centers in a manner that would be proportional to the population's health needs. In a statement published on 21 March 2020, MOH announced its urgent need for respirators, intensive care units and equipment, medicines, medical consumables and protective gear to prepare it to combat Coronavirus. MOH's appeal came after the Israeli authorities allowed the entry of limited quantities of medical supplies into the Gaza Strip on 18 March 2020, including equipment for diagnosing those infected with the Coronavirus, hundreds of protective gowns and goggles for the protection of medical personnel, upon a request Submitted by the World Health Organization (WHO).

MOH in Gaza announced the first 2 cases of Coronavirus in the Gaza Strip after a total of 118 people were tested (116 of them tested negative for the novel Coronavirus.) Moreover, 1399 persons were forced into quarantine, distributed on 22 quarantine centers across the Gaza Strip while 1969 are placed under home quarantine.[1]

On 19 March 2020, Michael Lynk, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, said in a statement that he is worried about the potential impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) on the Gaza Strip population. He added that the Gaza health care system was collapsing even before the pandemic, because its stocks of essential drugs are chronically low and its natural sources of drinkable water

are largely contaminated. He explained that Gaza's population is also a physically more vulnerable population due to the malnutrition, deteriorating living conditions and high population density. Lynk warned that the possible widespread outbreak of the novel Coronavirus in the besieged Gaza Strip will exacerbate pressures on medical personnel[2].

Furthermore, on 21 March 2020, Mr. Jamie McGoldrick, UN humanitarian coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, said in a statement that there can be frightening consequences of Coronavirus in Gaza Strip due to the high population density and limited health facilities. He added that "we are very concerned about the situation in Gaza Strip, it is a complicated area due to the long-term closure and the imposed-Israeli restrictions that could worsen the situation." McGoldrick also believed that the outbreak of Coronavirus in the Gaza Strip would turn it into "an incubator, especially when people get stuck in a densely populated area where health system suffers from the lack of funding, medical resources and equipment"[3].

In light of the fear of a health sector collapse in the Gaza Strip and the foreseeable inability of the healthcare system to deal with patients in the case of a Coronavirus spreads, PCHR:

- Stresses that the primary responsibility for providing medical supplies to the Gaza Strip population lies with Israel and it must take all necessary preventive measures available to combat the spread of infectious diseases in accordance with Articles 55 and 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.
- Calls upon the international community and WHO to put pressure on Israel and compel it to comply with its obligations, and to allow the entry of medical supplies and equipment necessary for Coronavirus medical examination.
- Calls upon the international community and humanitarian organizations to provide assistance to the health system in the Gaza Strip, including medical supplies to Gaza Hospitals, in order to combat the spread of Coronavirus.
- Stresses the need for coordination between MOH in Gaza and Ramallah to combat the spread of Coronavirus.
- Calls Upon the Palestinian National Authority to establish a unified higher emergency committee that includes all Palestinian governorates to follow through on the measures taken to combat the spread of Coronavirus, and to disseminate up-to-date information on inflicted cases and access health service.

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Notes

[1] To review MOH's full report issued on 23 March 2020, visit the following link:<https://www.moh.gov.ps/portal/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Corona-23-03-4.pdf>

[2] For the full statement issued on 19 March 2020, see the UN News website:
<https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/03/1051642>

[3] For the full interview published on 21 March 2020, see the UN News website:
<https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/03/1051802>

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