

Gaza: Health System On Brink Of Collapse

By [Physicians For Human Rights In Israel](#)

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

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Press Release: Physicians For Human Rights In Israel

Palestinian Health System in Gaza on Brink of Collapse; patients and injured denied access to medical care

1. Medical Crisis in Gaza

Israeli military forces commenced widespread operations against Gaza on 27.2.08, following the death of an Israeli civilian in a college campus in the south of Israel, and damage caused by a Qassam rocket to a hospital campus in the town of Ashqelon. As a result of these operations 101 Palestinians (according to Palestinian counts), the majority of whom were civilians, have been killed. Two Israeli soldiers have also been killed. This number of casualties is the highest since the start of the AlAqsa Intifada in 2000.

As early as Wednesday at 22:30, Israeli forces shelled the compound of the Ministry of Interior. As a result two civilian structures were severely damaged: the Palestinian Medical Relief Society office and dispensary, including its Mobile Clinic vehicle, and the offices of Palestinian human rights organization Al-Mezan. Both organizations are long-term partners of PHR-Israel and have provided for the rights of Palestinian patients and civilians for many years. 7-month-old baby Muhammad alBurai was killed in the same attack, when his home, adjacent to the compound, collapsed on top of him.

Following a weekend of continuous airstrikes, shellings and limited land strikes, hospitals in Gaza are now finding it almost impossible to function due to massive overload of injured people continuing to arrive for admission today, and since last Wednesday, 27.2.08.

The larger hospitals in Gaza are fully occupied. Since Friday 29.3.08, surgery is performed 24 hours a day in all 12 operating theaters of Shifaa' Hospital. Medical teams at this hospital are working in emergency mode since 4 days ago. Medical supplies and other equipment are dwindling, and there is a shortage in beds, needles, wound dressings, anesthetics and heavy medical equipment such as CPR machines.

As a result of recent events, the ability of hospital departments to maintain their routine services is impaired. The enormous numbers of injured arriving and the necessity to cover the shortage in beds has forced hospitals to stop medical treatment of dozens of patients, including cancer patients, heart patients and other chronic patients, and to send them to their homes until the end of the crisis.

According to medical information received from Shifaa' hospital, the majority of injuries are a result of direct hits, shrapnel and shock waves caused by bombardments by the Israeli air

force, as well as the collapse of buildings on their inhabitants.

Following basic initial care provided at Shifaa', and after assessment, the hospital has decided to refer dozens of patients in life-threatening condition with the greatest possible urgency to hospitals outside the Gaza Strip.

Of these dozens, PHR-Israel has received a list of 25 patients, all suffering from explosive injuries, who are in urgent need of medical care and were referred to Israeli medical centers. Fourteen are currently unconscious in grave danger of their lives, seven others are severe orthopedic cases (injuries to lower limbs) and four are severe internal cases. All have submitted requests to exit Gaza via Erez Crossing but have not yet received any response from the Israeli authorities. All the cases are severe and extremely urgent.

Although some patients have been allowed exit for care in recent days, Erez Crossing has been closed since noon today. Hundreds of other injured people, whose conditions allow transport to more distant medical centers, have been referred to Egypt, following an arrangement regarding injured patients between the Hamas government and the Egyptian government. A similar agreement has been reached with Jordan, but patients referred to Jordan must apply for an exit permit via Erez with the Israeli authorities.

2. While the Cannons Boom

PHR-Israel today received testimony regarding the death of Qusai Issa, 4 years old, of cancer (a neuroblastoma), on 12.2.08.

Qusai was treated in 2007 in Egypt, where his illness was diagnosed. He returned to the Gaza Strip since the treatment he needed was unavailable in Egypt. When he arrived in Gaza he received a referral to Tel HaShomer, an advanced Israeli medical center. After submitting a request for a permit and a delay of 20 days while awaiting a response, Qusai exited Gaza accompanied by his grandmother. He was hospitalized for a month at Tel Hashomer hospital and was released in good condition for a week's rest at home. He was told he must return to the hospital one week from his release for continued care.

Qusai's family applied for a permit but this time their request was rejected "on security grounds". The family submitted four separate additional requests, each with a different relative as companion, but to no avail. Only then did the family apply to PHR-Israel for help.

After several urgent phone-calls made by PHR-Israel to the Israeli authorities at Erez Crossing, the request was approved the same day, and Qusai finally exited Gaza with his grandmother on 7.2.08 - after a delay of 80 days!

When Qusai arrived at the hospital, his grandmother was told that due to the very great delay, his condition was extremely serious, terminal and irretrievable. He was returned to Gaza the same day.

Samir, Qusai's father, told us how his son deteriorated rapidly, and died five days later, on 12.2.08.

* PHR-Israel condemns this blatant attack on patients and medical installations and demands its immediate cessation by the Israeli government.

* PHR-Israel condemns any attack against civilians and civilian structures and demands that all sides respect this principle.

- * PHR-Israel demands that the government of Israel immediately ensure free access for patients and injured persons to medical centers outside Gaza, in order to ensure treatment both for them and for the other patients who are still awaiting care.
- * PHR-Israel strongly believes that the leaders of both peoples bear a responsibility to stop functionalising people for their political ends and to find an alternative way that will end occupation and bloodshed.
- * PHR-Israel calls upon all parties, including international donors, to prioritize a policy that will prevent bloodshed, over provision of charity that will only prolong the occupation.

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