

# The Gaza Medics Who Won't Give In to Israel's Evacuation Demand

In spite of an Israeli threat that their hospital would be bombed, the doctors of Al Awda just keep saving lives.

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*Dr Nisreen al-Shorafa has gotten barely 10 hours of sleep over the past seven days.*

*The 30-year-old surgeon runs the emergency room at Al Awda Hospital in Tal al-Zaatar, between Beit Lahia and Beit Hanoun, and she cannot recall a time when she has worked harder.*

Dedicated completely to helping save the people who survived the relentless Israeli bombing, she has pushed herself beyond what she thought she could do.

On Saturday, the hospital started receiving warning calls from the Israeli military. The message was stark and ominous: The hospital had to be evacuated because it would be bombed.

"I'll bet they [Israeli army] are proud of themselves, threatening to bomb the hospital," said resident nurse Asala al-Batsh.

"They insisted that everyone and everything move. All hospital personnel, all the patients, including those in the ICU, and the bodies in the morgue."

After trying to explain to the Israeli army on the phone the inhumanity and impossibility of moving everyone out of the hospital and southward, the team gave up.

"We decided not to leave," al-Shorafa said.



Ice-cream trucks and refrigerated food vehicles are being used to store bodies in Gaza as hospital morgues are filled to overflowing by the number of people killed in Israeli air attacks [Screengrab/Al Jazeera]

“The hospital’s board of directors have no way to know if we’re going to be bombed or not. But they’re sure that we are doing the right thing.

“We are absolutely right to heed the call of duty; as doctors, as nurses, all of us need to unite at times like this.”

### Al Awda Means ‘The Return’

In addition to working around the clock to treat all the injured people who have come through the doors, the hospital has opened its doors to those fleeing the destruction and looking for what they hope is a safe place to shelter.

Many people are afraid to heed Israel’s demand that they head south because convoys of evacuating people have been hit, and everyone in the hospital – doctors, patients, medics – is afraid that if they try to leave they will be killed on the road.

And so they huddle together, sleep deprived and running dangerously low on food and water.

The hospital says it has been receiving support from people living around it who are bringing in food and basic supplies for the patients and people seeking refuge.

“Working in a hospital, we hardly have time to eat on a normal day, so it is definitely not our priority right now,” another nurse said, explaining that any assistance is used for the patients.

All of the hospitals in the Gaza Strip are stretched several times beyond capacity, to the point that patients are lying in the corridors and dead bodies have to be kept in refrigerated

food or ice-cream trucks and lined up on the sidewalks before burial because the morgues are so full.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health has urged the international community to intervene several times, but no response or assistance has come.

“We’re doing as much as we can, but there are major shortages, especially in the emergency room, which is our first line of response to people coming in. We’re the line between life and death sometimes,” al-Shorafa said.

“We work so hard,” she said, her voice breaking. “We do absolutely everything we can, but then sometimes a patient will die ... it feels like so many people die every single day since the beginning of this war.

“It’s so hard, we feel utterly helpless,” she said as a tear made its slow way down her exhausted cheek.

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*Featured image: Some of the wounded at al-Shifa hospital (Gaza Health Ministry)*

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