

Hospitals, health and death in Gaza

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Human rights violations harm dignity and inflict suffering by causing loss of health and/or life. Thus, illness and death are the most tangible and irrefutable evidence of the commission of these crimes. The mounting death and injury toll from Israel's siege of Gaza, as well as its relentless and indiscriminate shelling against civilian population is part of a cruel and unjustified collective punishment of Palestinians. Any honest health worker could use the figures of civilian deaths and injuries caused by the Israeli army every day, to count on enough arguments to refute the lukewarmness and ambiguity with which the spokespersons of several country governments and international organizations hesitate to demand a ceasefire and to denounce this massacre as a crime against humanity or a genocide.

Although the armed actions led by Hamas militants may have been driven by desperation and rejection of the passive acceptance of the suffocating occupation and apartheid that Israel has imposed on the Palestinians since 1967, the deaths of the Israeli civilians who were killed on October 7 cannot be

justified. However, from that very day, the Israeli government launched a cruel and disproportionate military operation of punitive revenge; not only against Hamas militants, but against all Palestinians.

By the end of one month of hostilities, 10,202 Palestinian civilians had been killed as a result of the Israeli government's disproportionate punitive action. This figure includes the deaths of 4,104 children. On average, six Palestinian children are killed every hour. A UN statement dated the previous day noted that in addition to this figure, 1,270 children were missing or trapped in the rubble left by the bombardment¹. For this reason, Gaza, in addition to being the largest open-air prison in the world, has become the largest cemetery for children².

The number of civilian deaths caused by the Israeli army's bombardment is growing steadily and already exceeds the number of Palestinians who were killed in the same way during the fifteen Israeli military offensives carried out since 2008³.

Most, if not all, of the deaths of Palestinian civilians have been perpetrated with the use of U.S. weapons and ammunition; to these are added the deaths resulting from the use of weapons proscribed by international law, such as those using white

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¹ Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | UN OCHA Flash Update #30, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-30>

² Antonio Guterres, UN General secretary declared: "Gaza is becoming a graveyard for children. Hundreds of girls and boys are reportedly being killed or injured every day," <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/pressure-israel-over-civilians-steps-up-ceasefire-calls-rebuffed-2023-11->

[06/#:~:text=The%20health%20ministry%20in%20the,every%20day%2C%22%20Guterres%20said.](https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-30)

³ CNN News, Nov 7, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/11/07/middleeast/palestinian-israeli-deaths-gaza-dg/index.html#:~:text=At%20least%2010%2C022%20people%20have,under%20the%20age%20of%2018.&text=Note%3A%20Data%20as%20of%20Nov.%206%2C%202023>

phosphorous⁴. The incessant supply of weapons to Israel by the U.S. government is done in the knowledge that they are being used against defenseless civilian population.

The death toll reported by the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations still does not take into account the growing and still insufficiently quantified mortality caused by starvation, dehydration and communicable diseases resulting from the inhumane siege imposed by Israel, which severely limits access to water, food and fuel. This grave situation has been aggravated by the severe limitation on the entry of international aid imposed by Israel. This has condemned medical services to operate without power due to lack of fuel and with an almost complete lack of medical supplies. Only the courageous decision of the Jordanian government to send a plane to fly over Gaza, breaking the Israeli blockade and dropping several tons of medical supplies for a field hospital⁵, while recalling its ambassador to Israel. Inexplicably, this action has not been emulated by the United Nations or the governments of other countries.

The World Health Organization has repeatedly warned that the siege of Gaza will provoke a health crisis of incalculable dimensions. This will surely bring along trans-generational consequences. In the face of this situation, the Israeli government remains indifferent, showing its profound disregard for Palestinian lives. As a result of the siege, Palestinians in Gaza lack water, food and fuel. As result malnutrition, water borne diseases and many

other communicable and noncommunicable diseases will be on the rise.

The racist contempt for Palestinians became vociferously evident when an Israeli government ministry declared that "there are no such uninvolved civilians in Gaza" and that "Anyone who flies a Palestinian or Hamas flag should no longer be living on the face of the earth." "So the use of nuclear weapons in Gaza is an option." ⁶

Although this statement was disqualified by other officials, fearing international criticism, it is a clear indicator of the thinking of radical right-wing extremist groups that are not only growing by the day, but are part of Israel's current government.

By October 7, 2023, Gaza had 32 hospitals and 2,485 beds with an already insufficient availability of 1.3 beds per 1,000 inhabitants.⁷ However, this figure dropped dramatically due to Israel's attacks, in full violation of the provisions of international law to protect civilians in conflict situations,⁸ has and continues to bomb hospitals and ambulances. These attacks have halved hospital capacity and killed hundreds of health care workers, including doctors, nurses, aides and volunteers. Some of the hospitals that are still working have already been partially destroyed and/or are facing severe limitations due to lack of water, power and medical supplies. On October 17, al-Ahli hospital, one of the largest hospitals in Gaza City, was bombed by Israel, killing more than five hundred people, including patients, doctors and nurses, as well as hundreds of civilians seeking refuge.⁹

⁴ Amnesty International, Evidence of use of White phosphorus weapons in Gaza, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/lebanon-evidence-of-israels-unlawful-use-of-white-phosphorus-in-southern-lebanon-as-cross-border-hostilities-escalate/>

⁵ NY Times Nov 7, 2023, Jordan drops medical aid to its field hospital in Gaza, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/06/world/middleeast/israel-jordan-aid.html#:~:text=King%20Abdullah%20II%20of%20Jordan,effort%20between%20the%20neighboring%20nations> .

⁶ AA, Dropping a nuclear bomb on Gaza is an option, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israeli-minister-says-dropping-nuclear-bomb-on-gaza-is-option-3044272>

⁷ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/health-2018-02E.html

⁸ The Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols form the core of international humanitarian , 1949. <https://www.icrc.org/en/war-and-law/treaties-customary-law/geneva-conventions>

⁹ Associated Press, Rafah Hospital in Gaza es bombarded: <https://apnews.com/article/israel->

Despite this enormous tragedy, which in itself constitutes a serious war crime and one of the greatest violations of medical neutrality in recent times, Israeli military attacks continue to be directed at medical facilities, with consequences that are still difficult to quantify.

Physicians for Human Rights noted: "Health workers and health facilities are not military targets. Under international law, hospitals are protected sites. All parties must safeguard civilians, including all health facilities, workers and infrastructure. Atrocities by one side never justify atrocities by the other... We call for an impartial and independent international investigation into the attack on Al-Ahli al-Arabi hospital. The perpetrators must be held accountable for this grave violation of international law."

The war crimes committed against health facilities in Gaza have been condemned by the United Nations, by some governments and by numerous international organizations. However, they have enjoyed the approval of some sectors of the Israeli government and population who claim that Hamas uses the hospital infrastructure as a shield for its military actions.

About 100 Israeli physicians signed a letter to the Israeli army requesting the bombing of the Shifa Hospital in Gaza, arguing that it serves as a "shield for terrorists". In response to this letter, Physicians for Human Rights published a letter in response to this request and point out that even if Hamas were to use the hospitals to attack and shelter,¹⁰ "the doctors who signed the letter do not even address the minimum requirement of international law to not only issue warnings, but to take every

precaution to reduce civilian casualties..."¹¹ Which the Israeli military has failed to do.

AL Jazeera news agency extensively documented with images that one of the structures that had been presented by the Israeli army as a Hamas tunnel under Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Hospital and used as justification for bombing the hospital, was nothing more than the entrance to a water tank.¹² Similar arguments have been used to bomb other hospitals; attacks that have left hundreds of victims among the sick, health workers and people seeking refuge.

The genocide that at this very moment is still being carried out against the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank has already caused a pandemic of mental health disorders affecting hundreds, if not hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. Anxiety, sleep disorders, depression are already among its consequences. It would be enough for the readers of this text to make a quick recount of this situation in their person, family and friends to realize the magnitude and transcendence of the uneasiness, anxiety and sadness that has taken over the world; these emotions, spread by the media that dares to report the true facts, with a very high cost of deaths among its journalists.

The sadness and sense of helplessness that these atrocities produce have lasting and surely trans-generational effects, which will continue to affect us and even damage our self-perception as a human species; even more so, if in these moments of crisis we remain silent. In 2020, a survey among young Palestinians in Gaza found that 38% of them considered suicide as a way out due to increasing

[palestinians-gaza-hamas-war-biden-rafah-e062825a375d9eb62e95509cab95b80c](https://www.palestine-press.com/news/2023/11/8/palestinians-gaza-hamas-war-biden-rafah-e062825a375d9eb62e95509cab95b80c)

¹⁰ Middle East Eye, Israeli doctors group calls for bombing Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza, Nov 5, 2025 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israeli-doctors-group-calls-for-bombing-al-shifa-hospital-in-gaza/3044872>

¹¹ Physicians for Human Rights, The Letter that Outraged Us: The Physicians' Letter Calling for the Destruction of Shifa Hospital in Gaza, https://www.phr.org.il/en/phr_authors/physicians-human-rights-israel/

¹² Al Jazeera, Nov 8 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/8/investigation-disproves-israel-claim-of-hamas-tunnel-under-gaza-hospital>

despair.¹³ Most likely this percentage will grow with this offensive. Similarly, the news and images of the atrocities in Gaza broadcasted will contribute to the atmosphere of hopelessness that underlies the worldwide increase in youth suicides.¹⁴

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Israel's military escalation against Gaza is much more than an act of excessive punishment; it is a premeditated and long-planned action that uses the Hamas attack as a pretext to implement its final solution to the Palestinian problem.^{15 16}

To carry out the "final solution," the Nazi Germans coordinated and perpetrated the murder of the Jews of Europe. They murdered the Jews by implementing policies that led to starvation, disease, random acts of terrorism, mass shootings and death by gassing. The difference is that in the

Palestinian Holocaust, the sacrificial fire comes from American weapons.

Fortunately, the Israeli government does not represent all Jews nor all Israelis. Tens of thousands of Jews are opposing the ethnocide, marching and raising their voices to demand that Israel stop the slaughter and to say "Not in our name!".

The demonstrations and marches that are increasing in size and frequency day by day in numerous countries on all continents coincide in repudiating the actions of the Israeli government and condemn the Palestinian genocide. It is unacceptable that the millions of people around the world who oppose the genocide and dispossession of the Palestinian people are powerless to stop it. Despite the clear position of the United Nations Secretary and his calls for a ceasefire, the international organization has proven inoperative to stop the massacre, because it has been paralyzed by conflicting geopolitical interests. Only the growing diplomatic and economic isolation by the international community offers any hope of pressuring Israel for a ceasefire.

Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, vehemently repeats that the offensive against Gaza is a war not only of Israel, but of the whole world. In a way, he is right, the offensive against the Palestinians also includes the planet itself among its victims. This offensive together with all the disproportionate military mobilization of its allies is also guilty of distracting the whole world from the urgent task of fighting a global climate cataclysm that we are already experiencing; its war machines in this and other wars are accelerating at

¹³ UN OCHA Services, On the brink: Gaza's youth are turning to suicide amid growing desperation, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/brink-gaza-s-youth-are-turning-suicide-amid-growing>

¹⁴ Wasserman D, Cheng Q, Jiang GX. Global suicide rates among young people aged 15-19. *World Psychiatry*. 2005 Jun;4(2):114-20. PMID: 16633527

¹⁵ Arana M, El Holocausto Palestino, Observatorio del Derecho a la Salud, Nov.2, 2023, <https://radiozapatista.org/?cat=190>

¹⁶ Consortium News, Chris Hedges: Israel's Final Solution, Nov, 6, 2023, <https://consortiumnews.com/2023/11/07/chris-hedges-israels-final-solution/>

breakneck speed the intensity of climate change and thus also murdering us all.

All health care workers and academics are called upon to demonstrate and demand:

1. Immediate cessation of hostilities by all parties.
2. The immediate restoration of water, food and energy supplies for the entire civilian population of Gaza.
3. The release and handover of all Israeli and Palestinian hostages and prisoners to the International Red Cross.
4. The immediate convening of a special committee of the UN Security Council to negotiate a final status agreement on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1397 that guarantees the non-expulsion of the population and implements without delay the United Nations resolutions for the establishment of two states.
5. A technical and neutral international inquiry to investigate the war crimes committed by both sides and especially the violations of the principles of medical neutrality and to promote international action to punish those responsible.
6. That a world conference be convened at the highest level to update and strengthen commitments to respect international humanitarian law and particularly the integrity of health workers,

journalists and health facilities in all armed conflicts.

7. To call on all health professionals to preserve their commitment to human rights and health without any distinction based on nationality, ethnicity, race or any political or religious affiliation.

Final note. Despite the evidence that Gaza hospitals are not a justified military target and the constant international denunciations, on November 9, Israeli attacks on hospitals intensified. In a single day, the Indonesian hospital and the Al Nasr Children's Hospital came under heavy artillery fire, causing severe damage to these facilities. While these attacks were taking place and nearly five hundred more Palestinian civilians were being killed, the U.S. government, with a clear unwillingness to influence Israel to cease fire, announced as a humanitarian achievement that the Israeli government had agreed to a four-hour daily pause in shelling. With this action, the U.S. government endorses its pact of complicity with Israel and thus also its historical co-responsibility in the ongoing ethnocide. Simultaneously, the scenes of tens of thousands of tired, thirsty and hungry Palestinians trudging southward; Israel's final solution plan is underway.

