



Background Paper

Committee: World Health Organization

Topic B: Conflict in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and its effect on access to healthcare

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The deteriorating crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel has led to significant loss of life among civilians since 7 October 2023. The Gaza Strip is nearly out of medical supplies and already stretched health services, as airstrikes continue amid shortages in food, water and fuel. The escalating number of patients, many of them displaced civilians seeking shelter from the fighting now entering its second month, has filled hospital wards to capacity. Vital health services, including maternal and newborn care and treatments for noncommunicable diseases, have been dramatically interrupted. In addition, hundreds of Israeli civilians, many being children and elders were held hostages. In Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, health related killings have been reported with regard to attacks against wounded and sick persons, or on medical personnel/cultural property may amount to war crimes as well. WHO is working to help ensure people receive the care they need, including life-saving medical supplies. WHO continues to urge all parties involved in the conflict to protect health and allow safe access so that those in need can receive equitable health care.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict traces its origins to the late 1800s. In 1947, the United Nations passed Resolution 181, commonly referred to as the Partition Plan, which aimed to split the British Mandate of Palestine into distinct Arab and Jewish nations. On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was established, igniting the first Arab-Israeli War. This conflict concluded in 1949 with a victory for Israel, yet it resulted in the displacement of approximately 750,000 Palestinians and the regional division into three areas: the State of Israel, the West Bank (adjacent to the Jordan River), and the Gaza Strip.

In the subsequent years, regional tensions heightened, especially between Israel and its neighbors Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. After the 1956 Suez Crisis and Israel's incursion into the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria formed mutual defense agreements in preparation for a potential Israeli troop mobilization. Then, in June 1967, prompted by a series of actions from Egyptian President Abdel Gamal Nasser, Israel launched a preemptive strike against the air forces of Egypt and Syria, leading to the onset of the Six-Day War. By the conclusion of this conflict, Israel had taken control of the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

On October 7 of 2023, a Hamas-led assault in southern Israel resulted in the deaths of over 1,000 individuals, including 36 children, and around 245 people taken hostage. In response, Israel launched extensive military operations, claiming the lives of 21,600 Palestinians in Gaza, with about a third being children, and causing extensive destruction to 60% of residential structures. In the wake of the attack, Israel further tightened its 16-year blockade of Gaza, halting all essential supplies like food, water, electricity, fuel, and medical resources, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian crisis. Following the events of October 7, restrictions on movement in the occupied West Bank were also heightened. The Israeli authorities reinforced an apartheid framework that oppresses Palestinians within Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories through various laws and segregation policies, leading to deprivation and forced relocations. In Gaza, 1.9 million Palestinians were displaced due to Israeli military actions, out of a total population of 2.2 million. Violence from state-supported settlers rose significantly. In southern Israel's Negev/Naqab region, Israeli forces continued to demolish Bedouin homes and entire villages, marking some areas for demolition for the 222 time. In the West Bank, Israeli policing operations reached unprecedented lethality, with 110 Palestinian children among those killed, the highest toll since 2005.

Medical staff in the region also encountered violence. By December, 23 out of 36 healthcare facilities had to shut down due to damage and power outages. The World Health Organization noted that 600 individuals, including patients and medical workers, lost their lives in assaults on health establishments, along with 76 ambulances. In northern Gaza, both al-Ahli and al-Shifa hospitals were functioning at merely 5% of their capacity while facing an influx of injured and ill patients. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society reported that hospital bed occupancy reached an astonishing 310%.

The Polio Technical Committee for Gaza, which comprises the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), and other partners, has been forced to delay the third phase of the polio vaccination campaign due to the rising violence, heavy bombardment, widespread displacement orders, and the absence of guaranteed humanitarian pauses in much of northern Gaza. This final phase of the ongoing campaign was intended to immunize 119,279 children in the region, with the commencement originally scheduled for today.

Following the initiation of the second phase of the polio vaccination campaign in Gaza on 14 October 2024, a total of 442,855 children under the age of ten have been successfully immunized in the central and southern regions of the Gaza Strip, achieving 94% of the targeted goal in these areas. Additionally, 357,802 children aged two to ten years have received vitamin A supplements, as part of the strategy to combine the administration of the polio vaccine with other vital health services in Gaza.

Strengthening job recruitment integrity, addressing new methods of helping people medically, combating the problem in Israel and Palestine, and provide medical health for the victims, are essential steps to help thousands of people. If not stopped millions of lives will keep getting hurt or killed . The World Health Organization (WHO) urges delegates from all present countries to find a solution to this problem and help all of the victims.

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