

New incident with medical evacuation at Al Amal hospital marks unacceptable security conditions for humanitarian aid delivery

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Statement by the Humanitarian Country Team in Palestine

On 25 February, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and the United Nations evacuated 24 patients from Al Amal hospital in Khan Younis, including one pregnant woman and one mother and newborn. Al Amal hospital has been at the epicentre of military operations in Khan Younis for over a month. Forty attacks at the hospital from 22 January to 22 February, killing at least 25, have left it incapacitated.

Despite prior coordination for all staff members and vehicles with the Israeli side, the Israeli forces blocked the WHO-led convoy for many hours the moment it left the hospital. The Israeli military forced patients and staff out of ambulances and stripped all paramedics of their clothes. Three PRCS paramedics were subsequently detained, although their personal details had been shared with the Israeli forces in advance, while the rest of the convoy stayed in place for over seven hours. One paramedic has been released, and we appeal for the immediate release of the other two, and all other detained health workers.



Photo by PRCS

This is not an isolated incident. Aid convoys have come under fire and are systematically denied access to people in need. Humanitarian workers have been harassed, intimidated or detained by Israeli forces, and humanitarian infrastructure has been hit. Just prior to Sunday's incident, two family members of Médecins Sans Frontières were killed in an unprompted attack by Israeli forces against a deconflicted compound where their staff and family members slept.

The inadequate facilitation for the delivery of aid throughout Gaza means that humanitarian workers are subject to unacceptable and preventable risk of being detained, injured or worse; leaving us and our partners unable to safely reach northern Gaza and increasingly parts of southern Gaza.

The UN and partners have consistently communicated the requirements for meaningful facilitation of relief efforts across Gaza to the Israeli authorities. The bare minimum is this: acknowledging notification of a humanitarian mission in advance comes with the responsibility of facilitating safe, smooth and rapid passage on the ground. We will continue our engagement with the Israeli forces for those requirements to be met, so that the critically needed humanitarian response is enabled.

The UN and PRCS had to leave another thirty-one non-critical patients at Al Amal hospital.