

500 healthcare workers killed during Israel's military assault on Gaza

26 June 2024



As Gaza mourns 500 healthcare workers killed in almost nine months of Israel's military assault, Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) calls for independent investigations and an end to impunity.

As of 25 June, [500 healthcare workers](#) have been killed in Gaza since Israel's military assault began in October. This equates to an average of two healthcare workers killed every day, with one in every 40 healthcare workers, or 2.5% of Gaza's healthcare workforce, now dead. More healthcare workers have been killed in Gaza since October than were reported killed in all conflicts globally in 2021 and 2022 combined.

Systematic attacks on healthcare by Israeli forces are exacerbating the worst humanitarian crisis ever seen in Gaza. More than [37,000 Palestinians](#) have been killed and at least [86,000 injured](#) since

Israel's assault began, with an estimated 10,000 still trapped under rubble, most presumed dead. Instead of being able to safely provide medical care for those in urgent need, Palestinian healthcare workers have themselves come under both indiscriminate and apparent targeted attack by the Israeli military.

The 500th health worker reported killed was Hani Al Ja'afarwi, the Director of Emergency and Ambulance Services, during an [Israeli military airstrike](#) on a clinic in Gaza City on 23 June.

Dr Tanya Haj-Hassan, who volunteered in a hospital with MAP in March, said: "Palestinian healthcare workers have told me that when they leave the hospital, civilians give them civilian clothing because wearing scrubs is putting a target sticker on their back. This is how systematically healthcare has been targeted in Gaza."

Rohan Talbot, MAP's Director of Advocacy and Campaigns, said: "Hospitals, medical staff, and civilians all have protected status under international law, law that the Israel military has flagrantly ignored every day through its repeated targeting of healthcare facilities and staff. Though now happening at an unprecedented rate in Gaza, attacks on Palestinian healthcare by the Israeli military have recurred over many years, ever-worsening because of chronic impunity. This cannot be allowed to continue any longer. Every potential serious violation must be independently investigated and those responsible brought to justice."

The [UN has assessed](#) that the Israeli army has committed serious violations under international humanitarian and human rights law in Gaza against healthcare workers. Hundreds of health workers have been detained by the Israeli military, often arbitrarily and in abusive conditions. Two doctors, Dr Adnan Al Bursh, a senior orthopaedic surgeon at Shifa Hospital and Dr Iyad Al Rantisi, head of obstetrics and gynaecology at Kamal Adwan Hospital, reportedly died in Israeli military detention as a result of torture and ill-treatment. Dr Al Bursh worked with MAP over many years through our limb reconstruction project, and completed a fellowship at King's College Hospital in the UK. These deaths have yet to be properly investigated.

There have also been reports that the [body of a healthcare worker](#) was among those found in a mass grave outside Nasser Hospital, with the person's hands appearing to have been bound together. Hundreds of bodies were discovered in [mass graves](#) around Shifa and Nasser hospitals.

Since October, the Israeli military has been systematically dismantling Gaza's healthcare system, conducting more than [460 attacks on healthcare](#) facilities and personnel. Every single hospital in Gaza has been affected, and no hospital remains fully functioning in Gaza. [Nineteen hospitals](#) are currently completely out of service, and the healthcare system is now close to collapse.

Haider Al-Qudra, the Executive Director of the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) in Gaza, told MAP: "As long as the international community does not take any measures against Israeli forces that continue to violate international humanitarian law, we will lose more personnel working to meet the health and humanitarian needs of citizens on the frontline."

"Because of this systematic targeting from Israeli forces, 34 PRCS staff have lost their lives, most of them emergency medical services staff, including 19 while they tried to respond to emergency calls from citizens."

MAP has reported on attacks by Israeli forces on healthcare workers across the occupied Palestinian territory [over many years](#). These attacks have occurred consistently without genuine, independent investigations or meaningful accountability, making their worsening recurrence inevitable, as we see today. In 2023, MAP took the unprecedented step of [providing bulletproof vests](#) and helmets to the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) in the West Bank to help protect its paramedic teams who had come under repeated violent attack by Israeli soldiers and settlers.

Jihad Mansour, a PRCS ambulance driver, told MAP: “I have lived through all the assaults on Gaza but this has been the most intense, the most ferocious and led to the most casualties. Being an ambulance driver means you are working day and night, dealing with terror and fear all the time.”

As Israel’s military offensive has expanded in Rafah and northern Gaza, and border crossing closures are strangling the entry of aid supplies, MAP urges the international community not to turn a blind eye to the further destruction of the health system and resultant humanitarian catastrophe.

Urgent action is needed right now to safeguard innocent lives and allow the health system to recover as soon as possible. Attacks on healthcare must cease, Israel’s complete siege must be lifted, arms transfers to Israel must be halted to prevent their use in violations of international law, and an immediate ceasefire must be brokered.

Demand that the UK [suspends arms transfers](#) to Israel to prevent their use in further atrocities in Rafah, and takes urgent action for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

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Photo: Ambulance crews transport injuries from inside the ambulance, Gaza, 26 April 2024. (Credit: © Saher Alghorra/ZUMA Press)