

How we're responding to the war on Gaza

4 July 2024



Almost nine months into Israel's devastating military offensive, Gaza is facing an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. More than 37,300 Palestinians have been killed and over 85,500 injured. With essential infrastructure damaged, [almost the entire population displaced](#) from their homes, and the delivery of humanitarian aid severely restricted, infectious diseases and [acute malnutrition](#) are rampant, with more than [865,00 cases of respiratory infections](#) and almost [500,000 cases of diarrhea](#) reported.

The scale of health needs has far outstripped the capacity of Gaza's hospitals to respond, and the health system has all but collapsed as a result of Israel's indiscriminate bombardment and suffocating siege. Only [17 out of 36 hospitals](#) remain partially functioning, and those remaining lack basic commodities like medicine, equipment and fuel, and in some cases have suffered significant damage.

Based on more than 30 years' experience working in Gaza, Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP)'s local team reacted quickly to this crisis to save lives, and remain committed to helping preserve what remains of Gaza's health system, ensure that health workers have the equipment and support they need to keep saving lives, and even begin to rehabilitate those hospitals that have been damaged.

We spoke to Mohammed Al Khatib, MAP's Senior Programme Manager in Gaza, to hear about the team's work, and how supporters' donations are being used to uphold Palestinians' rights to health and dignity in Gaza.

Can you tell us what the experience of the last nine months has been like for you and MAP colleagues, working under the conditions of bombardment and siege?

The past nine months have been something I cannot truly describe. The destruction and sheer scale of need in Gaza has been huge. The team and I have been through so much, I don't really know how we have coped. But our work has helped to keep us going by providing support to other Palestinians who need it. MAP's supporters have been vital to this, and thanks to them we have been able to conduct our largest emergency response in 40 years of our operations.

How did MAP respond when Israel's attacks began?

From the start of the war, due to our long experience of operating in Gaza, we moved quickly to release our pre-positioned humanitarian supplies. We distributed more than \$630,000 USD worth of drugs, medical disposables, and other essentials from our warehouses to hospitals and [shelters](#).

Our close connections with local partners and suppliers also meant that we were then quickly able to source over \$1.9 million USD worth of [medicines and equipment](#) from the local market. This included items like bandages, catheters, surgical gloves, and assistive devices, all of which are urgently needed when Gaza's health system is under attack.

What have you been able to achieve since then, despite the bombardment and siege?

We quickly set up operations in Egypt and have delivered more than \$4.3 million USD worth of medical items (including antibiotics, ultrasound gels, intravenous paracetamol, and saline), food items, and other humanitarian supplies [through border crossings](#) into Gaza.

To support local healthcare workers, I have been involved with managing [our emergency medical teams \(EMTs\)](#). These are groups of international medical experts brought into Gaza to provide medical care such as surgeries for traumatic injuries. So far, our EMTs have worked in Al Aqsa Hospital, Nasser Hospital, and the European Gaza Hospital, and delivered 1,240 consultations and 360 surgeries.

With hospitals overwhelmed with injured and sick patients, we've also established 12 medical points in central and southern Gaza in partnership with community organisations. These points offer primary healthcare services, monitor and address communicable diseases, and provide sexual and reproductive health services. Further down the line, we are establishing a large medical point in Gaza's Middle Area to deliver primary health care services and psychosocial support.



Mohammed Al Khatib (centre), alongside other MAP colleagues, receiving a delivery of medical supplies through the Rafah crossing.

What support has MAP been able to provide to people displaced by Israel's attacks?

The Israeli military has driven around [1.7 million people](#) from their homes, often multiple times, myself included. In order to help those many displaced people, we have provided some \$3 million USD worth of [hot](#)

[meals](#), blankets, hygiene kits, winter clothes, nutritious food packages, and nearly \$350,000 USD worth of shelter supplies comprising tents, mattresses, and bed sheets.

In the last month, we also launched a nutrition programme to protect 150,000 women, children, and others at risk of malnutrition, through frontline health services, nutrition screening, and prevention over the next two years.

What obstacles does MAP face getting aid into Gaza?

Since October, we have had to overcome a range of challenges to get aid into Gaza and deliver it to people who need it. The first hurdle is at the border crossings. Before Israel's military assault in October, there were around 500 trucks per day entering Gaza, but since the start of the war the Israeli military has put huge restrictions on what can enter.

On many days our trucks full of medical supplies are sat waiting to be allowed in, with medical items like anaesthetic machines and even crutches rejected for arbitrary reasons. In April, what was being allowed in could only meet around 20-40% of people's needs.

We used to get most of our trucks and our EMTs into Gaza through the Rafah crossing in the south, at the border with Egypt, but since 7 May, Israel has closed that border. This has forced us to focus on different entry points as well as looking into procuring more locally.

At present the only possible ways to get aid into Gaza are either through the Kerem Shalom crossing in the south or the Zikim point in the north. This needs coordination with UN agencies, or with local suppliers that are vetted to bring goods into Gaza. Both ways are not easy and require time and effort, with limited amounts allowed in and long lists of banned items.

Just recently, we managed to deliver more than \$82,000 worth of vital medical supplies to Al Awda Hospital in the north of Gaza via the Zikim point. So, despite the challenges we're facing, we're still able to get gradual aid into Gaza. And there is much more to come.

There has been mention of the new US temporary pier being a solution to poor aid access, but as far as I know they have only brought items through it a limited number of times and have had a lot of technical issues. MAP has never been able to use it and there is no clear way for us to coordinate through it. We know from experience that the best way to get aid into Gaza is via land crossings, and that is our focus.

Once aid enters Gaza, are you able to get it to those who need it?

Once aid is inside Gaza, there is a new set of challenges, both around insecurity and logistics. The level of destruction means that often roads are impassable, storage locations no longer exist, or electricity and fuel are in short supply or unavailable. This makes moving aid between the north and the south extremely difficult.

There are also constant dangers of attack – nowhere in Gaza is safe. Throughout the war, the Israeli military has systematically attacked healthcare, humanitarian workers and civilians trying to get aid and food for their families. This has made it sometimes very difficult to reach people in need. On one trip to Khan Younis, my team was caught up in a sequence of attacks next to us. We were trapped in a flurry of explosions, shrapnel, debris and smoke, but luckily no-one was seriously injured.

Nevertheless we persist, and we have been so proud to be able to get our medical supplies to hospitals that need it. For example, we recently managed to get four trucks of aid to Al Awda Hospital, which was besieged and damaged by the Israeli military in [May](#).

How is MAP supporting the rehabilitation of Gaza's hospitals?

Why does MAP not support field hospitals?

I was utterly devastated in February when I walked into Nasser Hospital, in Khan Younis, after it had been [attacked](#) and largely destroyed by the Israeli military. It is a hospital I have visited for many years, so to see it forced to shut down by such violence was distressing.

Since then, it has been a source of hope to work as part of MAP [to rehabilitate the hospital](#) and bring it back to life. We have been working with partners to redevelop the surgery departments, the intensive care unit, operating theatres, and hemodialysis and sterilisation services. We have also worked to enhance infection prevention and control measures

We have been doing the same kind of work in hospitals across Gaza. After the Israeli military's second ground invasion in Shifa Hospital it was fully out of service, no wings or buildings were functional at all. There was no electricity, no infrastructure for water or sewage, and the list goes on.

This is where MAP comes into play. We are renovating parts of Shifa Hospital, we are going to establish five medical points with one of our partners in the north, and we are going to support one of the only hospitals in the north that provides paediatric services.

Our focus is, and always will be, building a sustainable healthcare system in Gaza. I have witnessed so much evidence that the Israeli military is systematically dismantling Gaza's healthcare system. So now, because of this unprecedented emergency, our mandate has switched to sustain whatever remains of the local health system. We want to continue to support our Palestinian colleagues in their own hospitals, rather than direct work to field hospitals which are not permanent or run by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

MAP's team in Gaza were among the first to respond to the current emergency and remain one of the only international organisations working to provide humanitarian and medical services, including in the north. Please [support our emergency response](#) today.

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