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Israel attacks remaining medical infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, further reducing Palestinians' chances of survival

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Geneva - As it enters the fifth month of its genocidal war against the Gaza Strip, Israel has not stopped targeting what is left of the health system there and

is sabotaging any chance it may have to save Palestinian lives by firing and bombarding hospitals, ambulances, and medical teams, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor said in a statement issued Friday.

The rights organisation has documented several serious Israeli military attacks in the past few days which have disrupted the partial return of hospital services, particularly in Gaza City and the Strip's northern regions. These attacks are part of a larger Israeli attack on the Gazan health sector, ongoing since 7 October 2023.

The Euro-Med Monitor team has documented the killing of Muhammad Al-Omari, a paramedic at the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS), and the wounding of two other paramedics—one with shrapnel in his eye, the other in his chest—after an Israeli sniper opened fire at their vehicle in Gaza City on Wednesday evening, 7 February. The paramedics were attacked while evacuating wounded people from Gaza City hospitals to the Strip's southern region, despite their prior coordination with the Israeli army.

Israel's army targeted the Medical Development Foundation in Al-Shifa Medical Complex on the same day, according to Euro-Med Monitor, resulting in the killing of five displaced people. The rights group stressed that continued Israeli air raids and bombings of the hospital, which typically include the dropping of leaflets urging residents to evacuate despite there being nowhere safe to go, will put Al-

Shifa out of service and disrupt any attempt by medical personnel to resume their work, especially as was subjected to massive military attacks in November. At that time, Al-Shifa was stormed, bombed, and had its departments, buildings, and equipment purposefully destroyed by Israel.

Artillery shelling and gunfire targeted Al-Awda Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip twice this month, Euro-Med Monitor added, emphasising that Israel is still preventing the delivery of fuel and medical supplies that are necessary for the hospital to be able to reopen.

The situation in hospitals in the southern Gaza Valley is not any better, stated the human rights organisation. Israeli forces have been besieging and attacking Khan Yunis hospitals Al-Amal and Nasser with fire and missiles since 22 January, putting them both almost completely out of service. They have also stormed Al-Khair Hospital, in the west of Khan Yunis, killing several patients, displacing and arresting people, and forcing the surviving patients—many of whom were in poor health—to evacuate under gunfire.

According to the Geneva-based organization, one displaced person was killed yesterday evening (Thursday), by gunfire from quadcopter drones directed at Nasser Hospital. The victim was trying to connect to his family via the Internet from the building's roof, and did not pose any threat or danger to anyone. Euro-Med Monitor also reported that a

nurse was seriously injured by Israeli snipers stationed in the vicinity of the same hospital, while a girl was killed at the hospital's gate two days ago while she was trying to get water.

With 450 injured patients, several thousand displaced people, and 300 medical staff members, the Nasser Hospital is severely lacking in anesthesia, critical care medications, and surgical supplies, the human rights group warned. Additionally, the Israeli army blocks ambulance access, making it difficult for the sick and injured to get to the facility.

Though most of the displaced people were evacuated first, PRCS Al-Amal Hospital in Khan Yunis was subjected to severe bombing and shootings as well, and its surgical department had to shut down after it ran out of fuel and oxygen. Euro-Med Monitor confirmed on 5 February that the Israeli army ordered the evacuation of the hospital following 15 days of military attacks and a complete siege. This order resulted in the immediate evacuation of approximately 8,000 people, who had nowhere else to go. Forty elderly people, eighty sick and injured individuals, and 100 administrative and medical staff members were left behind at the facility.

Israeli soldier fired at an Al-Amal Hospital patient who was lying in a hospital bed on Wednesday, 7 February, while another gunshot wounded the patient's companion. There are currently more than 200 people in the hospital, including patients,

medical and administrative staff members, said Euro-Med Monitor.

Meanwhile, the fate of PRCS ambulance team members Youssef Zeino and Ahmed Al-Madhoon, who went to rescue six-year-old Hind Rajab on 30 January, remains unknown. The evacuation mission of the child, who was trapped in a vehicle under Israeli fire, had been previously coordinated with Israeli forces. The PRCS had previously published a recording of the child's desperate appeals for help.

Israeli forces arrested PRCS volunteers Tamer Muhammad Hussein Shaheen and Hamdan Samer Abu Khater last Tuesday as they passed through a military checkpoint set up to evacuate displaced people from Al-Amal Hospital. This comes at a time when over 100 medical personnel, including the directors of three hospitals, have been forcibly disappeared by Israeli forces since their arrest.

Euro-Med Monitor once again strongly condemned Israel's flagrant violations against medical personnel, hospitals, and ambulances, which are supposed to enjoy special protection under international humanitarian law. The rights organisation cited the Geneva Conventions in particular, which forbid attacks on hospitals, their staff members, and their vehicles in any way, and mandate that they be respected and protected at all times. Under international humanitarian law, it is also unacceptable to cease providing adequate protection for civilian hospitals unless those hospitals

are being used—against their humanitarian obligations—to carry out operations that harm the enemy. Israel has consistently failed to offer any proof to support its repeated assertions in this regard.

International humanitarian law also prohibits attacks on medical transports of wounded and sick civilians; the elderly, disabled, and infirm; and postpartum women, grants them special protection on an equal basis with hospitals, and requires them to be respected and protected at all times.

Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor contended that the targeting, siege, and obstruction of health system operations are part of a deliberate Israeli operation to reduce Palestinians' chances of survival and to deny their rights to human rights, health, and medicine as part of Israel's ongoing genocide campaign against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Intentionally directing attacks against buildings, materials, medical units, transport vehicles, and personnel wearing the distinctive emblems of the Geneva Conventions in conformity with international law constitutes a war crime in both international and non-international armed conflicts, according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The rights organisation further demanded that an independent international investigation be launched immediately into the war crimes and grave violations that Israel has committed against hospitals, medical personnel, and medical transports in the Gaza Strip. These violations have included turning numerous

hospitals into combat zones, the extrajudicial killing of Palestinians, and the denial of health care to all Palestinians living in the Strip, which puts their lives in danger. Euro-Med Monitor stressed that all efforts be made to bring those responsible for these crimes and violations—as well as those who gave the orders—to justice at all levels of the legal system, including the International Criminal Court.
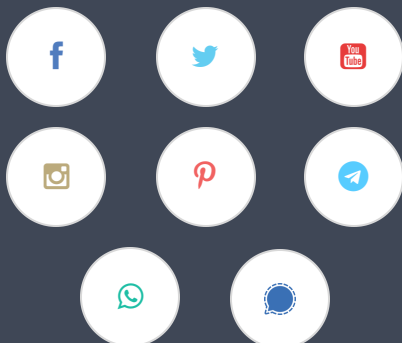
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