

Israel obstructs polio vaccination campaign in Gaza with its military attacks, detention of UN convoy



The UN convoy carrying polio vaccines that was stopped by the Israeli army. 9 September 2024.

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Israel-Palestinian Territory

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Palestinian Territory - Israel is obstructing the polio vaccination campaign in the Gaza Strip through its continued military attacks in vaccination-designated areas, along with obstructing the arrival of a UN convoy on its way to northern Gaza to implement the vaccination campaign.

At around 7:30 am today, Israeli warplanes bombed a group of Palestinians near a food kiosk in Gaza City's Al-Shawa Square, killing five people, including a child.

The bombing occurred concurrently with the launch of the polio vaccination campaign in the area, which is being carried out by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in collaboration with the UN and regional organisations north of Wadi Gaza. Notably, that the bombing specifically targeted

the area around a food kiosk in the neighbourhood of Al-Tuffah, which is situated between three locations that were deemed safe for administering polio vaccinations.

These attacks are part of a larger plan aimed at exacerbating the man-made humanitarian crisis plaguing Gaza and increasing the risk to the lives of children

Based on information gathered by the Euro-Med Monitor field team, the targeted food stall is located in

the Tuffah neighbourhood in the east of Gaza City, just a short distance from the safe vaccination centres that have been designated for the Tuffah, Al-Daraj, and Al-Balad neighbourhoods of Gaza City.

From the beginning of the polio vaccination campaign on 1 September, the Israeli army has ignored all calls for a humanitarian truce or a temporary cessation of attacks during vaccination hours. Instead, it has continued its military attacks on all areas of the Gaza Strip, from the north to the south, launching dozens of air raids targeting sites near vaccination centres in the southern, central, and now northern sections of the Strip.

Despite prior coordination, the Israeli occupation army detained a UN convoy on Monday for over eight hours. The convoy was on its way to northern Gaza when it was stopped at gunpoint just after the Wadi Gaza checkpoint, with Israeli forces threatening to detain UN staff. Israeli military bulldozers also caused heavy damage to the UN armoured vehicles before eventually releasing all the staff; the convoy later returned safely to the UN base. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the convoy had both national and international staff travelling to roll out the polio vaccination campaign for children in Gaza City and northern Gaza.

This grave incident is the most recent in a string of violations against UN personnel that have occurred despite Israeli authorities being given prior notice of specific programmes designed to provide relief, with Israeli forces shooting at convoys, killing and targeting hundreds of UN employees, and detaining several of them. These crimes confirm the existence of a deliberate Israeli plan to obstruct humanitarian efforts in the Strip, which is suffering from grave and deteriorating health and humanitarian crises.

Deliberately initiating heavy military assaults during the vaccination campaign will undoubtedly make it more difficult for Palestinian families to get to health facilities and will raise their anxiety, which may lead them to refrain entirely from travelling to these centres. The ongoing military attacks indicate that Israel has a clear and deliberate intention to thwart efforts to combat the poliovirus and undermine the vaccination campaign.

Additionally, these attacks are part of a larger plan aimed at exacerbating the man-made humanitarian crisis currently plaguing the Gaza Strip; preventing the alleviation of Palestinian suffering there; increasing the risk to the lives of Palestinian children and society at large; and intensifying the comprehensive crime of genocide being committed by Israel in the enclave.

The international community must pressure Israel to immediately cease its military assaults in order to guarantee that the polio vaccination campaign is carried out as quickly and thoroughly as possible. Israel bears full responsibility for protecting the lives and safety of Palestinian children from the virus, as this crisis is primarily the result of the crime of genocide it has been committing against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip since 7 October 2023. The international community is legally and morally obligated to force Israel to stop its genocide, which includes the destruction of basic infrastructure and the health sector in the Strip, repeated forced displacement, and deprivation of all basic necessities of human life due to the ongoing arbitrary and comprehensive blockade and constant bombardment.