
Health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem

The Executive Board,

Noting the role of WHO within its mandate as the directing and coordinating authority on international health matters;

Expressing grave concern at the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and its vast consequences for the civilian population, and in light of the gravity of the current escalating situation, and the magnitude of the intense damage on the public health sector, that has, to this date, killed and injured thousands of civilians, the majority of them children, women and elderly, including humanitarian and health workers, in addition to thousands of victims who remain under the rubble;

Emphasizing that all civilians, including health and humanitarian aid workers, must be protected, in accordance with international humanitarian law, and deploring in this regard the heavy civilian casualties and widespread destruction;

Expressing further concern at the large-scale destruction of health facilities including hospitals and ambulances, and at the catastrophic humanitarian conditions that have been inflicted on the public health system in the Gaza Strip;

Recognizing that attacks on medical and health personnel result in long-lasting impacts, including the loss of life and human suffering, weaken the ability of health systems to deliver essential life-saving services and produce setbacks for health development;

Expressing also deep concern at the killing of more than one hundred UN staff including WHO staff;

Commending WHO, its Director-General and its staff and health cluster partners in the field for remaining and delivering, and for their tireless efforts to address the situation on the ground in the Gaza Strip, early on, despite severe dangers to their lives, and expressing appreciation to all humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners that are delivering life-saving aid to alleviate the impact of the conflict on civilians;

Bearing in mind the appeal for a humanitarian ceasefire by invoking Article 99 of the United Nations Charter; [U.N. Secretary-General, Letter dated Dec. 6, 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, U.N. Doc. S/2023/962 (Dec. 6, 2023)];

Recalling the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols, as applicable, as well as relevant customary international law concerned with the protection of the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities, and the obligation of all parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances [SC Res 2286, WHA 65.20];

Recalling further the specific obligations under international humanitarian law to respect and protect, in situations of armed conflict, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, and hospitals and other medical facilities, which must not be attacked, and to ensure that the wounded and sick receive, to the fullest extent practicable and with the least possible delay, the medical care and attention required [SC Res 2286];

Expressing concern at the inadequate humanitarian access to, and its grave impact on, the Palestinian civilian population, and underlining the urgent need for necessary humanitarian measures, including humanitarian pauses, to ensure full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access throughout the Gaza Strip;

Expressing concern also at the dire situation of hospitals and other medical facilities and ambulances, and the obstruction of the provision of the fuel necessary for their operation, endangering the lives of the sick and wounded, and preventing the conduct of medical operations and procedures, and the operation of medical equipment including incubators for premature newborn babies and surgical and resuscitation equipment for persons suffering from severe medical conditions;

Expressing further concern at the fact that the civilian population has been exposed to conflict and insecurity, leading to significant mental health and psychosocial needs, underlining the importance of urgently providing mental health and psychosocial support, as well as trauma-related services, to the affected persons particularly children;

Underlining the disproportionate effect on children, women, elderly, disabled persons and the chronically ill, and recognizing the need to address their specific health needs, including the special health needs of persons with disabilities, bearing in mind the challenges they face in accessing medical services, which are compounded in the current situation, as a result of the destruction of civilian infrastructure and residential buildings, and the resulting additional restrictions to human mobility;

Expressing concern at the public health management implications of the existence of thousands of corpses of victims in the Gaza Strip buried under the rubble, which are exacerbated by the lack of access to water, electricity, and equipment needed to bury the bodies of the dead;

Expressing further concern that intense overcrowding in shelters coupled with disrupted health, water and sanitation systems and lack of fuel pose increasing risks of the spread of infectious diseases, including waterborne, airborne, vector and vaccine-preventable diseases;

Recognizing the interconnectedness between health and other sectors, such as water and sanitation and nutrition, and the need for a comprehensive approach to humanitarian assistance, and stressing that ongoing challenges in the Gaza Strip, including restrictions on the movement of goods can impact food availability contributing to malnutrition, while the limited availability of clean water, increases the risk of outbreaks and epidemics, and stressing that access to clean water and sanitation facilities is crucial for maintaining public health,

1. CALLS FOR the immediate, sustained and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief, including the access of medical personnel, the entry of humanitarian equipment, transport and supplies in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular the Gaza Strip, and the granting of exit permits for patients in need of medical treatment outside the Gaza Strip, and stresses the need for the unhindered and safe passage of ambulances at checkpoints, especially in times of conflict [based on A/HRC/Res/52/3];
2. CALLS UPON all parties to fulfil their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law to ensure, to the fullest extent of the means available to it, the supply and replenishment of medicine and medical equipment to the civilian population, and reaffirms that all parties to armed conflict must comply fully with the obligations applicable to them under international humanitarian law related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict and medical personnel [GC IV, article 55; SC Res 2286];
3. DEMANDS that all parties fully comply with their obligations, in particular their obligations under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the obligations applicable to them under the Additional Protocols, to ensure the respect and protection of all medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities [based on OP 2, SC Res 2286];
4. DEMANDS further a sustained, orderly, unimpeded, safe and unobstructed passage for medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their equipment, transport and supplies, including surgical items, to all people in need, consistent with international humanitarian law [SC Res 2286], calls for the passage for ambulances and medical evacuations of critically injured and sick patients as well as respect and protection of the wounded, sick and injured, and ensuring the safety, security and safe movement of all Palestinian patients to receive medical needs and treatments, and calls for the human treatment of all persons deprived of their liberty and their access to medical treatment in compliance with international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols;
5. REQUESTS the Director-General:
 - (a) to report, based on field monitoring and assessment conducted by the WHO emergency teams, on the public health implications of the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, including with respect to acts of violence against the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities, and submit recommendations in this regard to the 154th session of the Executive Board and to the fourth meeting of the Standing Committee on Health Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response, and to the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly;
 - (b) to coordinate with donors, prior to the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly, to secure the funding for the immediate health needs as well as the rehabilitation and rebuilding of the health system in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, and calls on Member States, donors and international humanitarian and development actors to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, and to ensure the allocation of human and financial resources in order to urgently achieve these objectives;
 - (c) to assess, in full cooperation with relevant UN agencies, the extent and nature of psychiatric morbidity, and other forms of mental health and psychosocial support needs and challenges of all affected persons;

(d) to strengthen and to continue providing the necessary technical and material health assistance in order to meet the health needs of the Palestinian people, especially the most vulnerable;

(e) to continue strengthening partnerships with other UN agencies such as UNRWA and relevant partners in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, to enhance humanitarian health response capacities by delivering emergency aid and protection in an inclusive and sustained manner before, during and after the military operations and the humanitarian crisis;

6. CALLS upon the international community to secure appropriate funding to support the immediate and future needs of the WHO health programmes in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, and for rebuilding the Palestinian health system, in full cooperation with WHO and relevant UN agencies such as UNRWA and partners.

Second meeting, 10 December 2023

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