

Medical missions in Gaza trapped without access to supplies and basic aid

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Two medical missions that include upwards of 20 American physicians and healthcare workers have been trapped in the European Hospital in the Khan Younis, Gaza area near Rafah since Israel closed off the border crossing into Egypt last week to stop any food, water, fuel or supplies from entering the besieged enclave, as part of Israel's US-backed genocide.

According to a May 13, 2024 report by Ryan Grim and Hind Khoudary in the *Intercept* on the plight of these healthcare workers, the actions by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have made the already catastrophic humanitarian crisis an immediate threat and danger to the lives of nearly 1.4 million starving and injured people who are trapped in Rafah, an area measuring just 25 square miles (65 square kilometers).

Grim wrote on his social media platform that the situation looked grim for the doctors and medical workers, who are rationing water under conditions where they face extreme dehydration and at least one member is on an IV drip. Monica Johnston, a volunteer burn trauma nurse from Oregon who arrived on May 1, told the *Washington Post* they were “stuck in Gaza [with] no safe way to get out and no new help or supplies coming in.”

The dire situation facing the medical mission was made particularly evident when former Indian Army officer Colonel Waibhav Anil Kale, 46, a staff member of the United Nations (UN) Department of Safety and Security (DSS), was killed Monday when the UN vehicle, identified by its UN logo and flag, in which he was traveling through Rafah to the European Hospital, was fired upon by the IDF.

On the incident, a family member of one of the doctors told the *Intercept*:

We are aware that a car that is similarly supposed to be their rescue passage was shot at, and UN employees were killed and injured. [And] we fear for their ability to have a safe passage and exit. We are aware that there is active shelling around the hospital and that staff has been told to stay away from windows.

At a press briefing on Monday, following questioning by a

Washington Post reporter on the medical workers' desperate situation, State Department spokesman Vedant Patel said:

I'm not sure of the operational or logistical specifics of what was involved in the efforts, but I can say that we are aware of these US citizens—doctors and medical professionals—who are currently unable to leave Gaza. As I have said before, we don't control these border crossings, and this is an incredibly complex situation that has very serious implications for the safety and security of US citizens.

He then added the usual banal disclaimer: “But we're continuing to work around the clock with the government of Israel and with the government of Egypt on this issue.”

The killing of Kale is the first of an international UN worker in Gaza. However, it raises the fundamental issue that in its genocide in Gaza, carried out with the unflinching support of the US and EU, Israel cannot tolerate even the most limited support for the population of Gaza, which is being exterminated wholesale.

The coordinated airstrikes in early April that killed seven international aid workers from World Central Kitchen, and which were defended by President Joe Biden, were not “mistakes” or “misidentifications.” Even doctors, nurses and medical workers, regardless of their nationality, are deemed by the IDF as aiders and abettors and therefore legitimate military targets. Under these conditions, the comments by Patel are simply calculated and disingenuous.

Like the deliberate starvation of the population of Gaza, the systematic targeting of Gaza's healthcare infrastructure is not an incidental consequence of war, but a key pillar of Israel's genocidal campaign.

In the span of the seven-month onslaught, doctors and healthcare workers have been systematically targeted. Nearly 500 physicians and first aid responders have been killed. Over 1,500 have been wounded and more than 300 detained by Israel.

According to the Palestinian Authority more than 80 percent

of Gaza's healthcare centers are now out of service and the rest partially function with a scarcity of the essentials needed to treat the ongoing mass casualty event. There is nothing hyperbolic about UNICEF's recent description of the European Hospital as Rafah's "last lifeline."

The disclosure of the death of noted Palestinian surgeon Dr. Adnan Al-Bursh, 50, who died on April 19 while detained by Israeli authorities at Ofer prison in the occupied West Bank, only confirms the monstrous trajectory of Israel's campaign.

Dr. Al-Bursh, head of orthopedics at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, was arrested by the IDF in December along with colleagues while he was treating patients at Al-Awda Hospital during the ground invasion of the Jabalya refugee camp. He had been detained for more than four months when he died.

According to CNN, his body has still not been released and the cause of death is undisclosed. However, one of Al-Bursh's fellow prisoners who was released said that the doctor had been tortured and killed.

Systematic torture of Palestinians detained by Israeli forces has been amply affirmed and documented by various sources, to which the Biden White House has turned a blind eye. Many are stripped naked, blindfolded, handcuffed with zip ties and bound to their beds. Many have had their hands amputated from injuries sustained from prolonged periods in handcuffs. Physical and mental torture is rampant. Beatings, as one whistleblower told CNN, "were not done to gather intelligence. They were done out of revenge."

On the death of Al-Bursh, Dr. Marwan Abu Saada, his friend and director of Al-Shifa Hospital, said:

[This is] heartbreaking news for everyone, for his family, the medical staff at Al-Shifa Hospital, and for Dr. Adnan's patients. This is the last thing we expected, and it's difficult for the human soul to bear this news.

Nurse Monica Johnston, who can be seen with an intravenous line in her arm, provided a harrowing account on the current situation on the ground:

As a human being, you can't discount the unimaginable suffering that is happening here to children, to women, to everybody. For example, I helped a young boy in the operating room who was apparently opening a can of tuna. He lost one hand, part of another, and his legs needed to be amputated. This is not okay. On top of that, there is an increased level of trauma that I have ever seen in my life.

Working at a level one burn and trauma center I can count maybe a handful of injuries of this magnitude that I have dealt with in a year. Here I am dealing with a

handful of fresh tragedies of this magnitude in a day. Now think of the resources it takes to take care of just one of these patients. In America, sometimes we are running short on that. Here, with no new aid-supplies coming in, you just can't do it. You can't keep these people alive.

And now, with the border closed and Rafah being invaded, staff aren't coming to work for fear of their own safety and their family's safety. So, you have an ICU staffed with less than half of the nurses and doctors. I saw two physicians the other day rounding on three ICUs. The nurses, doctors and cleaning staff, everybody is exhausted... we don't have the supplies; we don't have the human beings to maintain it.

She concluded:

I am begging anybody to reach out to their local governments to beg for a ceasefire so we can get more aid in, more supplies, more people and we can safely exit when it's time to leave our mission. These people need our help. Please help.

Given the financial and material backing of Israel's military campaign by Biden and company—infused with an additional \$26.4 billion in a bipartisan vote by the US Congress—such appeals will only fall on the deaf ears of the imperialists, who see the campaign in Israel as a broader geopolitical maneuver in the Middle East.

Indeed, the appeal must go to the international working class to oppose the ongoing genocide and bring an end to the war drive that is being escalated by the entire ruling class. The working class that produces the entire accumulated wealth on the planet is the only force with the material means to end the wholesale slaughter of the Palestinian people and prevent a further descent into barbarism.



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