

Britain's healthcare workers must demand Israel release Gaza's Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya

NHS FightBack
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NHS FightBack supports the stand taken by healthcare workers across Britain mobilising in support for Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, medical director of Gaza's Kamal Adwan hospital. We echo the demand that he is released immediately from Israel's Rakefet interrogation centre, where he is being tortured and faces death.

Speaking last week, Nasser Odeh, Abu Safiya's lawyer, visited him on July 2 at the Rakefet interrogation facility in Nitzan Prison, northern Israel. He said Abu Safiya was brought to the meeting shackled by his hands and feet and accompanied by masked prison guards. He bore fresh, severe injuries to his head, around his eyes, and on his ears and neck—to the extent that Odeh initially struggled to recognize him. He was struggling to breathe and speak and was in a state of distress.

Extremely weak, Abu Safiya told Odeh, "This is the last time you'll see me... they brought me here to kill me". He added, "I'm living in hell. The mind can't imagine what I go through every day. I think someone has decided to kill me."

Dr. Abu Safiya, a paediatrician, became the public face of Gaza's collapsing healthcare system. He spoke out publicly against famine conditions, mass injuries among children and the damage sustained by Gaza's hospitals, giving interviews to international TV journalists even as the bombardment intensified.

Despite attacks, the shortage of medical supplies and electricity outages, Abu Safiya managed to increase the capacity of Kamal Adwan Hospital. In October 2024, he refused to leave what was then the last functioning hospital in northern Gaza after the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) declared the area a combat zone and ordered the entire civilian population to evacuate.

Days later, his 15-year-old son Ebrahim was killed in

a drone attack, in a deliberate act of revenge.

On December 27, 2024, the IDF, having bombarded the hospital and forcibly evacuated its patients and staff, detained Dr. Abu Safiya, claiming the hospital was a Hamas stronghold. He has been held without charge or trial, much less any evidence, as an "illegal combatant" in Israel's prison system ever since.

A still image—taken from a video shot on December 24, 2024—of Dr. Abu Safiya walking down a heavily bombed and destroyed street in his white medical coat toward Israeli military vehicles, is the last time he was ever seen on camera. The photo has been viewed millions of times on social media by people demanding Dr. Abu Safiya's release.

Initially denied access to a lawyer, he was held in Ofer prison in the West Bank, where he was subjected to beatings with batons and electric shock sticks, forcibly stripped, tightly shackled, and forced to sit on sharp gravel for hours. He was held in solitary confinement, subject to nearly constant interrogation and denied medical treatment for his heart condition. Within months, he had lost more than 40kg and sustained multiple injuries.

The Rakefet interrogation centre was opened in the early 1980s to house a small number of the most dangerous organised crime figures in Israel; it was closed a few years later because the conditions were deemed inhumane. All the prisoners' accommodation—their cells, a tiny exercise yard and lawyers' meeting rooms—are underground, depriving inmates of natural light.

Far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir brought it back into service for Palestinian detainees after October 7, 2023. Official data reveals that about 100 detainees are being held there, with reports of regular beatings and violence.

Human rights organisations B’Tselem’s report “*Welcome to Hell*”: *The Israeli Prison System as a Network of Torture Camps* documents systematic abuse and torture across Israel’s prison network.

The advocacy group Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) has warned that Abu Safiya’s treatment drastically deteriorated after the Israeli High Court’s rejected his appeal against his detention last month. After more than one-and-a-half years’ incarceration, it warned that his life is in imminent danger and demanded his immediate release.

Last week, a group of artists—including musician Paul Weller, and the bands Primal Scream and Kneecap—issued a video quoting Dr. Abu Safiya’s words to his lawyer. The statement demanded Dr. Abu Safiya’s freedom declaring, “This man is a paediatrician. He is the best of us, and yet he and many others are being taken, tortured and murdered by Israel, without charge! If this great man dies on our watch, due to lack of action by our leaders against Israel’s impunity, it will be yet another stain on our collective humanity.”

More than 2,500 healthcare workers have signed a petition also calling for the release of Dr. Abu Safiya and other detained Gaza medics. They delivered the petition to the Royal College of Physicians (RCP).

On Saturday, healthcare workers and campaigners gathered in central London to call on Britain’s leading paediatric body to publicly demand Dr. Abu Safiya’s release. They handed over a petition condemning Israel’s detention of medical workers in Gaza, saying the profession has a duty to defend its colleagues.

Last week, hundreds of demonstrators gathered outside the prime minister’s office in Downing Street. Activists hung a banner and a Palestinian flag from London’s Tower Bridge, demanding urgent action to save Dr. Abu Safiya.

The mobilisation by medical professionals takes place in principled and courageous defiance of the Labour government’s efforts to silence opponents of genocide. A recent report commissioned by former Health Secretary Wes Streeting has recommended banning National Health Service (NHS) staff wearing or displaying symbols expressing solidarity with Palestine. The report was produced by a commission headed by Lord Mann, the former Labour MP who played a leading role in the “left antisemitism” witch-

hunt in the Labour Party.

An open letter to Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper from over 800 doctors and medical professionals, coordinated by Amnesty International UK and Health Workers 4 Palestine, stressed that Dr. Abu Safiya is one of more than 400 healthcare workers arbitrarily detained by Israel since October 2023, 83 of whom are still held, and warned he could die.

It adds that Israel’s detention of healthcare workers forms part of a wider strategy to dismantle Gaza’s healthcare system—alongside the killing of over 1,700 healthcare workers since October 2023 and the damage or destruction of every hospital in Gaza—conduct the signatories say is evidence of genocidal intent.

Last month, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel pointed to Israel’s deliberate destruction of healthcare as evidence of its genocidal targeting of children. Deliberate IDF attacks on neonatal and paediatric hospitals had forced their closure, with the “foreseeable effect” of depriving newborns and children of essential care.

Just one year after the start of the war, only 54 of Gaza’s 178 incubators across eight neonatal intensive care units remained functional. There had been a 300 percent rise in miscarriages, 70 percent of newborns were premature or underweight, and birth defects and long-term vulnerabilities had surged. The sharp fall in the birthrate threatened the continuity of the Palestinian population.

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