

Gaza, 9 years on: a humanitarian catastrophe

In their 2014 Correspondence,¹ Tanya Haj-Hassan and colleagues asked the medical community to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. During a period of 50 days in July and August, 2014, Israel's military operation in Gaza killed 2551 Palestinians and injured 11 231.² More than 1500 Palestinian children were orphaned. The UN Agency for Palestinians (UNRWA) described this period as "catastrophic, unprecedented and unparalleled".²

9 years and thousands of rounds of bombardment later, the death toll in Gaza since Oct 7, 2023, has surpassed 11 000, of which more than a third are children.³ Over 27 000 people have been injured. With the military operations of Israeli occupation forces focused to the north and on Gaza City, 70% of Gaza's population of 2.2 million people has been forced southwards, yet civilians fleeing (or already displaced) to the south have not been spared.³

What is most concerning is the disregard for international humanitarian law, under which hospitals and medical personnel are specifically protected. Over 51% of Gaza's education facilities have been bombed, including facilities run by UNRWA, where thousands of displaced people are seeking shelter.³ The deliberate targeting of hospitals, water tanks, oxygen production facilities, and solar panels and generators, while minimising essential medical supplies, food, water, and fuel from entering Gaza, has led to a total collapse of the health-care system in Gaza.⁴ This collapse has meant amputations have been performed without anaesthesia, burns debrided without pain relief, and surgery taking place under light from mobile phones. It has also meant no treatment or pain relief for patients with cancer, no dialysis for patients in renal failure, and inadequate or no

treatment for patients with diabetes and other chronic diseases.³ Even ambulances carrying critically ill people to hospital or into Egypt for medical care have not been spared bombardment, with 55 damaged so far.³ 198 health-care workers have already been killed.³

Relentless bombing and scarce fuel and medicine supplies have meant that 22 (61%) of 36 hospitals in Gaza are now non-operational, with only one hospital in the north (Al-Ahli Arab Hospital) providing limited care. There is intense fighting around the Al-Shifa and Al-Quds hospitals, and Israeli forces have raided Al-Shifa Hospital and are interrogating patients and medical staff.⁵ Little or no access to power and oxygen is a potential death sentence for ventilated patients and premature babies in incubators, and in Al-Shifa Hospital, 32 patients (including six premature babies) have already died.⁴

As a medical community, we know our first responsibility is to save lives, a pledge we work to uphold wherever we are. If we are unable to do this with our hands, then we have a moral duty to use our voices. Once again, 9 years later, we are imploring the medical community to use their collective voice to call for an immediate ceasefire and prevent us from losing our humanity.

This Correspondence has been co-signed by 15 members of the health-care community (appendix). We declare no competing interests.

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See Online for appendix

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