



Item 7-General Debate
Joint Oral Intervention¹
45th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council
30 October 2020
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Madame President,

Thousands of Palestinian patients from the Gaza Strip are struggling to receive adequate medical treatment due to restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities as part of its closure policy. Israel imposes severe restrictions on the import of medical equipment under the pretext of “dual-use items”. Moreover, the barring of entry of health workers and the targeting of medical infrastructure across the Gaza has left the health sector lacking adequate medical services and specialized medical personnel to cope with the needs of two million Palestinians.

Consequently, there has been an increased need for seriously ill-patients to receive treatment outside the Gaza Strip, especially cancer patients as radiotherapy and increasingly chemotherapy treatments are unavailable in Gaza. Patients and their companions are required to obtain an Israeli issued exit permit to pass through the Erez crossing, the only crossing connecting the Gaza Strip to other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). However, patients are increasingly denied access due to the arbitrariness of the permit system which unlawfully preconditions urgent and lifesaving care for thousands of Palestinians.

In 2019, the Israeli authorities received 24,340 medical permit applications. Israel rejected 35% of the applications. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2017, 54 patients, including three children, died while waiting to receive exit permits. The health crisis in Gaza worsened this year. In March, the Israeli authorities further restricted eligibility criteria for exit permits, in response to the outbreak of COVID-19, only providing access to authorized cancer patients and emergency cases. Moreover, in May 2020, the coordination between the Palestinian and Israeli authorities, including the coordination of medical permit application, was suspended in response to Israel’s plans to annex parts of the West Bank. As a result, the number of patient permit applications dropped by more than 90 percent compared to previous months.

Months later, WHO imitated a temporary coordination mechanism to support Gaza patients and their companions to apply for exit permits to mitigate the impact of the cessation of coordination.

It is in this context that Gaza is struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic, with more than 1485 active COVID-19 cases and 21 deaths as of 28 September 2020.

Israel, as the occupying power, violates Palestinians’ right to the highest attainable standard of health, and in the most extreme cases, their right to life. Our organizations urge the Human Rights Council and its member states to call on Israel to immediately rescind its arbitrary permit system without delay.

Thank you.

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