

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 15/001/2008

14 January 2008

UA 11/08

Medical concern

ISRAEL/OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN
TERRITORIES/EGYPT

Rihab 'Attia Abu Taha (f), aged 28
Karima Abu Dalal (f), aged 34
Bassam al-Oehidi (m)
Sha'aban Fares Salama Abu 'Obeid (m), aged 37
Tayseer al-Qanou' (m), aged 50
Ibrahim al-Qanou' (m), aged 28
Rami al-Masri (m), aged 25
Ahmad Mas'oud (m), aged 20
Sameer Taleb (m), aged 47
Iyad Jandiya (m), aged 32
Amin Fayad (m), aged 28
Rami Al-Arouqi (m), aged 29
Bassam al-Dos (m), aged 35

The Israeli authorities are refusing to allow critically ill Palestinians to leave the Gaza Strip for urgent medical treatment which is not available in Gaza. Since Israel tightened its blockade on the Gaza Strip in June 2007, closing the crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, every one of the 1.5 million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip requires permission to leave from the Israeli military authorities. This is almost always refused.

The 13 people named above all have cancer or other life-threatening illnesses. Refusing them passage out of the Gaza Strip deprives them of the treatment they urgently need and puts their lives in danger. Dozens of people refused passage out of Gaza for medical treatment have died in the past few months.

In response to a petition lodged by the Israeli human rights organization Physician for Human Rights-Israel, the Israeli Supreme Court examined the military authorities' decision to refuse passage out of Gaza to a number of the 13 sick people. The court acknowledged that they needed urgent treatment, but ruled that it could not intervene in the decision to refuse them passage from Gaza.

The Israeli authorities say they cannot allow these and other critically ill patients to leave the Gaza Strip because of unspecified "security" reasons. Such restrictions, though common for several years, have reached their highest level in recent months, notably since Hamas won power in Gaza in June 2007. Denying passage to patients in desperate need of medical care serves no legitimate security purpose, as all patients undergo strict security checks at the crossing, and are generally gravely ill. These measures appear to be retaliation for rocket attacks launched by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza into southern Israel.

Several patients denied permits to leave Gaza on "security" grounds have eventually been allowed to leave after Israeli human rights NGOs threatened to take their cases to the Supreme Court. However, far more patients are not allowed to leave Gaza.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Some 1.5 million Palestinians have been trapped in Gaza since 9 June 2007, when Israel closed their main gate to the outside world, the Rafah Crossing point to Egypt. Only a handful of Palestinians have since been permitted to leave Gaza, and have done so from Israel (via the Erez crossing, used almost exclusively by foreign journalists and humanitarian workers but closed to Palestinians, bar rare exceptions).

Medical facilities in Gaza lack the specialized staff and equipment to treat a range of conditions, such as cancer and cardiovascular illnesses. Hospitals and medical facilities are also increasingly short of drugs and disposable supplies as a result of Israel's blockades on Gaza's imports. According to the World Health Organisation, scores of essential drugs are out of stock, and stocks of scores of other drugs are low.

Under international law, Israel, as the occupying power, is prohibited from imposing collective punishment or reprisals on the Palestinian population, and must ensure that the residents of the Gaza Strip have access to the necessary medical care. .

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

To the Israeli authorities:

- expressing grave concern that the 13 patients (naming them) have been prevented from leaving the Gaza Strip for urgent medical treatment that they cannot get at home, and this puts their lives in danger;
- pointing out that under international law, Israel, as the occupying power, must ensure that the residents of the Gaza Strip have access to medical care to the same extent as nationals of the State of Israel.

Ehud Barak
Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
37 Kaplan Street
Hakiryia, Tel Aviv 61909, Israel
Fax: +972 3 691 6940
Email: minister@mod.gov.il
Salutation: Dear Minister

Brigadier General Avihai Mandelblit
Judge Advocate General
6 David Elazar Street, Hakiryia, Tel Aviv, Israel
Fax: + 972 3 608 0366
Email: arbel@mail.idf.il
Salutation: Dear Brigadier General

To the Palestinian Authority and Egypt:

- calling on them to work urgently to ensure that Israel reopens the Rafah crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, which is the only gate to the outside world for the population of Gaza.

Mahmoud Abbas
President of the Palestinian Authority
Fax: +972 2 296 3170/296 3179
Salutation: Dear President

His Excellency Mohammad Hosni Mubarak
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
'Abedine Palace, Cairo, Egypt
Fax: +20223901998
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 February 2008.