

PUBLIC

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Medical concern

ISRAEL/OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN
TERRITORIES/EGYPT

Nufuz Husni (f), aged 44
Muhammad al-Hurani (m), aged 25
Rami Al-Arouqi (m), aged 29
Karima Abu Dalal (f), aged 34
Rami al-Masri (m), aged 25
Sameer Taleb (m), aged 47
And at least nine others (five men and four women) with cancer

The Israeli authorities are preventing critically ill Palestinians in the Gaza Strip from leaving in order to access treatment which cannot be obtained in Gaza. Those named above, and at least nine others, all with cancer or other life-threatening illnesses, have been denied permission to access potentially life-saving treatment outside Gaza in the last few weeks.

The 1.5 million Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip cannot leave without a permit issued by the Israeli army allowing them to use Gaza's only functioning crossing point into Israel. The overwhelming majority of such requests, including many undertaken for patients needing potentially life-saving care, are refused. The Israeli branch of the international organization Physicians for Human Rights (PHR-Israel) reports that in the past two weeks there has been a significant increase in the number of Gazan patients who have been denied permits by the Israeli authorities. PHR-Israel has handled the cases of 11 patients who have been denied permits to medical centres in Israel since the beginning of April.

Nufuz Husni, a 44-year-old woman who suffers from a malignant tumour located close to the kidney, is one of these cases. In the last two years she has travelled to Israel four times for treatment. However, following a recent urgent referral by her doctors in Gaza, after a severe haemorrhage, she has been denied a permit to cross the Gazan border.

The Israeli authorities run a shuttle-bus service, guarded by Israeli security forces, which transfers urgent medical cases denied permits to alternative medical centres in Egypt or Jordan. However, according to PHR-Israel this bus on average runs only once every five weeks. Last-minute cancellations are frequent and seating limitations force patients to wait for the next bus. In the past week three shuttle-buses that would have enabled dozens of medical patients to access treatment were scheduled then cancelled. The patients remain trapped in Gaza. The Israeli authorities have now closed the borders with the Gaza Strip and the West Bank until the end of the Jewish Passover festival on 27 April. Currently, there is no indication when another shuttle bus may be scheduled.

One of those who had hoped to use the shuttle bus, Karima Abu Dalal, is in particularly poor health. She has been denied a permit to leave Gaza for treatment since November 2007. In normal circumstances there is a high success rate for the treatment of Hodgkin's Lymphoma. On 26 March, after Amnesty International once more publicised her case, Israeli authorities announced that they had issued her a permit to travel to Egypt and to Jordan. However, owing to the cancellation of the shuttle-buses she is still unable to leave for Egypt.

More than 40 critically-ill patients died in the last few months after being delayed or prevented from leaving the Gaza Strip. The Israeli authorities say they cannot allow these and other critically-ill patients to leave Gaza because of unspecified "security" reasons. 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.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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. The very few Palestinians who have since been permitted to leave Gaza have done so via the Erez crossing to Israel. Medical facilities in Gaza lack the specialized staff and equipment to treat a range of conditions. Hospitals and medical facilities are also increasingly short of spare parts for medical equipment as a result of Israel's blockades on Gaza's imports. Under international law, Israel, as the occupying power, is prohibited from imposing collective punishment or reprisals on the Palestinian population and must ensure that Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank receive the same extent of medical attention and hospital treatment as their own nationals. The shuttle-bus service, which has run on few occasions since the beginning of 2008, in no way fulfils these obligations under international law.

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 15 critically-ill patients have been denied permits to access potentially life-saving treatment outside Gaza in the last few weeks;
- pointing out that under international law, Israel, as the occupying power, has the responsibility to ensure that the population of Gaza has access to medical care to the same extent as nationals of the State of Israel.
- expressing grave concern that the shuttle-bus which transports critically-ill patients from the Gaza Strip to Jordan and Egypt is currently not functioning after being postponed three times in the week starting 13 April;
- noting that these patients need urgent medical treatment that they cannot receive at home, and that delays and denials in their requests to leave Gaza puts their lives at risk.

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 30 May 2008.