

## Health Work Committees (HWC)



## Health Situation in the Palestinian Occupied Territories

After seven years of Al-Intifada

28/9/2007

# **Health Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories**

## **After seven years of Al-Intifada**

**“The financial embargo imposed by the donor countries to the Palestinian Authority is not consistent with their duties and responsibilities in defending human rights. The cessation of support for the health sector does not only lead to economic blockade, but to a health catastrophe of civilians including children, women and people with special needs. Never in the history have the donor countries exercised such blockade on the ill, the weak, and the elderly living under the occupation.”**

**Human Rights Council of the United Nations ", Paul Hunt," 2007**

A report issued by the office of the United Nations for observation of humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories indicated that the poverty rate has reached 65%, and the loss of food security rate has reached 34% of the Palestinian families, where the unemployment rate rose from 41.8% to 58.6% between the years 2006 and 2007. A report issued by the a.m. office assured that the number of check points and internal barriers and checkpoints in the West Bank has increased by 40%, where more than half of the apartheid wall of a length of 733 km had been built.

### **The effect of military barriers and checkpoints on patients:**

- 1- The closure of barriers for consecutive days during Jewish Holidays and the so-called security cordon, which causes a threat to their lives.
- 2- Delaying patients on checkpoints; this threatens their lives and aggravates their illness.
- 3- Sometimes the patients are forced to walk and get off the bus or car at the time where they are in very serious and critical state of health; unable or not allowed to walk, which contributes to aggravating their illness.
- 4- Sometime patients are forced to bear the disease, and stay untreated due to the obstacles caused by the complicated procedures, the long waiting on the checkpoints and the increased movement expenses.
- 5- It is sometimes risky for some cases to be delayed on checkpoints.

The control of the water resources as well as the pollution resulting from the hazardous Israeli industrial remnants and the burial of dangerous wastes within the Palestinian Territories, has led to the aggravation of environmental degradation. Some examples of the Israeli practices within this area are the discovery of about 250 barrels of hazardous chemical wastes buried in Em Al-Tout Land in Jenin city. These were remnants from a paints factory in Ganim Settlement, most of which were dangerous and flammable materials. Also, some remnants were discovered to be buried in Qalqilia, Azzoun, Jayyous and Tulkarem in the north of the West Bank. The Palestinian Environment Quality Authority was able to locate more than 50 places in the West Bank where hazardous wastes were buried into by the Israelis, in addition to discovering cases with cancer in the southern area of the West Bank due to the burial of dangerous chemicals from one side, and the Dimona nuclear reactor from another. All the mentioned practices are considered to be violation of the environmental rights of the Palestinian human beings.

## **The Health Situation:**

- 2% of the families do not have safe drinking water resources, where the percentage reached 31.5% in Dier Al Balah.
- The decrease by 12% in the number of women who get care after delivery during the last couple of years.
- 10% of the palestinians suffer from at least one chronic illness, with an increasing percentage of 31% compared with the year 2006.
- 34.1% of pregnant women get the Tetanus vaccination during their last month of pregnancy.
- 2.8% of women deliver at home, where the birth of underweight babies is doubled in Gaza Strip by 9.6%. The percentage of deliveries that took place on the way to hospital or at checkpoints has reached 0.6%.
- 2.5% of children suffer from moderate or severe emaciation, and 3.85% suffer from moderate or severe weight loss.
- 14.8% of the elderly suffer from at least one disability at the age of 60, where 64.5% suffer from at least one chronic illness.
- The spread of Mumps amongst children especially in Gaza Strip.
- The rates of Anemia have increased by 56% in West Bank and 82% in Gaza amongst children under the age of 5.
- The rates of Anemia have increased to 34% amongst pregnant women in West Bank and to 52% in Gaza.
- The increase in the rates of Diarrhea among infants and babies under the age of 5, where 11.7% of them suffered from Diarrhea and 14.1% from Respiratory diseases.

## **Some Psychological effects:**

- 1- Loss of appetite for food.
- 2- Physical disorders such as headaches, dizziness, vomiting and lack of breathing.
- 3- Disturbance of memory, attention and concentration.
- 4- Urination disorders among children especially during the night.
- 5- Bad moods and great sadness.
- 6- Some suffer from mental disorders.
- 7- Speech disorders among children.

Health crews face difficulties in moving and reaching areas in order to control the sand fly, which spreads intensively at the Jordan Valley (Al-Ghor Area). This fly transports Leishmaniasis to humans. A recognized increase of the number of people with Leishmaniasis was recorded in the areas where health crews are prohibited by the Israelis from reaching them. The weakness in fighting this fly has led to the increase of cases with Leishmaniasis in those areas in the West Bank.

The Israeli Authorities imposed arbitrary fees on patients that reach up to \$500 per patient for them to transport them from Beit Hanoun crossing to one of the Palestinian or Israeli hospitals in Jerusalem by Israeli ambulances, where Palestinians ambulances were prohibited from offering this service to the Palestinian patients.

The lives of thousands of passengers departing or arriving in the country are subjected to danger, especially the elderly, children, women and patients, after treatment or surgery, where they are forced to wait for long days on the crossings facing difficult conditions, which lead to complexity of their health status and exposes the risk of death.

The prevention included patients transferred to Al-Makased hospital as well, which is considered to be the pioneer transferring and training hospital in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, so as St. George Eye hospital, Augusta Victoria hospital for the diagnosis and treatment of tumors, Ramallah hospital for conducting Catheter heart operations, the Arab Medical Hospital that offers services for cancer patients, and Rafidia hospital which offers Catheter heart operations for children, noting that such services are not available in Gaza hospitals.

The Israeli Occupation Authorities have also decided to prevent the entry of the medicines manufactured or stored in the West Bank or Gaza Strip to the hospitals in Jerusalem. This had a negative impact on the entry of the medicines, which affected the hospitals ability to provide the health care for their patients, and increased the isolation of Jerusalem from its Palestinian surrounding.

Adding to that, Israel is putting obstacles in the way of Palestinian doctors for them not to go outside to get their specialized training, in spite of the fact that the Israeli Occupation is mainly responsible for the low specialized medical services in West Bank and Gaza Strip.

**Strike has caused the following:**

- Stopping the distribution of medicines, medical equipment, lab material and vaccinations from the Ministry of Health storages to primary care centers and governmental hospitals.
- The great decrease of the number of patients getting treatment in primary care centers and outside clinics in hospitals and the number of resident patients which forced them to go to the private sector and civil hospitals under the difficult economic circumstances.
- The delay in distributing vaccinations, and consequently the delay of vaccination of children at the time determined by the United Palestinian Vaccination Programme, which negatively affects the immunity of children and thereby subjects many of them to infectious diseases.
- The delay in the maintenance of several treating and diagnosing medical equipment.
  
- A report issued by the World Health Organization in the Occupied Palestinian Territories showed that 60% of surveyed hospitals in August 2007 recorded a disorder in a significant number of treating and diagnosing medical equipment. Also a number of oxygen intensifying stations are not functioning in 2 of 11 hospitals. And as a proof of how difficult the situation is in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, three of the four cross sectional x-ray sets operating in Gaza hospitals are not functioning, sometime due to the shortage in the spare parts needed to operate them and the difficulty for technicians to reach and operate them properly.
  
- The Israeli Occupation forces have targeted the ambulances and health crews during the last period, where 38 of them were killed, 471 injured, and 2179 ambulances were disabled and prevented from reaching the injured and sick people to rescue them by transporting them to health centers and hospitals, which lead to the death of 142 people. In addition to that, 38 ambulances were totally destroyed, where 140 were partially damaged. Some hospitals and health centers were subjected to bombing, incursion and inspection by the occupation forces, which led to damages in the buildings and the registration of 388 assaulted health institutes during this period of time.

### **Military Barriers:**

- The existence of the Israeli occupation forces on the military barriers forms a tragic reality that increases the suffering of the Palestinian residents. 69 pregnant women were forced to deliver their babies on the barriers. Watching and hearing the women screaming at them to allow them reach the hospitals for delivery and receive the appropriate health services, the Israeli soldiers simply ignored them, which led to the abortion and death of 35 babies and the death of 5 women.
- Due to the Israeli closure, the checkpoints, barriers, settlements, the bypass roads and apartheid wall, passengers and ambulances are subjected to continuous obstacles for long hours by the Israeli soldiers. A number of 142 patients had died on the barriers until 7/4/2007, where the Israeli occupation forces blocked the ambulances during the transfer of sick and injured people to hospitals despite their critical health situation.

### **Prisoners:**

- More than 1200 of the male and female prisoners are ill; they suffer from chronic illnesses, deformities in the backbone, and the Respiratory Diseases and Bronchial asthma due to the tight area of cells where the prisoners are locked in the Israeli jails. The prisoners also suffer from shortage of medicines and health care. In addition to malnutrition and poor ventilation and lightning.
- Number of martyrs inside prison has reached 186 since 1967, due to torturing them, killing them after they are arrested or medical negligence. 69 were killed being tortured inside the prisons during investigations, 42 died as a result of medical negligence and not receiving the required medical care, and 63 prisoner died during Al Intifada of Al Aqsa, where 50 of them were murdered on purpose and after arrest.
- Regarding female prisoners, the Israeli occupation forces arrested about 10,000 women since the year 1967, from which 700 during the Intifada of Al Aqsa. 118 of them are still in prisons to this day.

#### Live evident

(In 2/2007, At Jabal Al-Zaitoun military checkpoint, the soldiers forced “Ali Ayyad”, the owner of Cliff Hotel and the member in the Municipal Council in Abu Dees, to take off his clothes and sit on a chair that is filled with dirt and water in the yard, where they teased and humiliated him for a long period of time).

### **Health Work Committees sees that the International Community should:**

- Implement the decision of the International Court of Justice in The Hague on 9/7/2004 which states that the construction of the apartheid wall on Palestinian land must be halted, because of its negative impacts on health conditions.
- Stop the occupation aggressive actions against the unarmed civilians such as daily killings, the continuous invasions, the arrests and humiliations on barriers and checkpoints.
- Stop the aggression of the occupation against the Palestinian health institutes and the workers in the health sector, and allowing Palestinian patients to travel to get the proper treatment without any obstacles on barriers and checkpoints.
- Facilitate the entry of medicines and medical equipment through Israeli harbors and crossings into the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

- Respect ambulances, medical crews and patients and facilitate their access to hospitals, and between villages and cities and on military barriers and check points.
- Facilitate the access of patients to the hospitals in Jerusalem transferred from West Bank and Gaza hospitals, and stop isolating Jerusalem from its Palestinian surrounding.
- Alleviate the suffering of Hebron residents in general and the old city residents in particular and allow them to reach health services, and stop the settlers' aggression against them.
- Improve the living and health conditions for prisoners in general, and children, women and patients in prison in particular, and provide the needed health care to them.
- Stop the economic and financial embargo on the Palestinians inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- Support the health sector through the support of The Ministry of Health, as well as the civil health institutes responsible for this sector, and that owns and runs over 95% of the health institutes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- Send an International Investigation Committee to the Occupied Palestinian Territories to investigate in the aggressive Israeli practices against unarmed civilians, and stop them from using these civilians as human shields, and check the types of the lethal weapons the Israelis use against the civilians.
- Pressure on the Israeli occupation force to abide by the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 which provides for protection of civilians in Time of War.

**“The interim relief aid provided by the donor countries in different ways, away from the elected Palestinian government, cannot cover the requirements of the health sector to provide the basic health services for the civilians. Protecting the human health rights is a permanent and essential obligation, especially under the political crises. Donor countries have failed during the last year in protecting the patients, the weak and the elderly rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. That’s why the donor countries had to provide quick aid for the Palestinian health sector.”**

**Human Rights Council of the United Nations ", Paul Hunt," 2007**

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