

The Destruction of Gaza's Healthcare System

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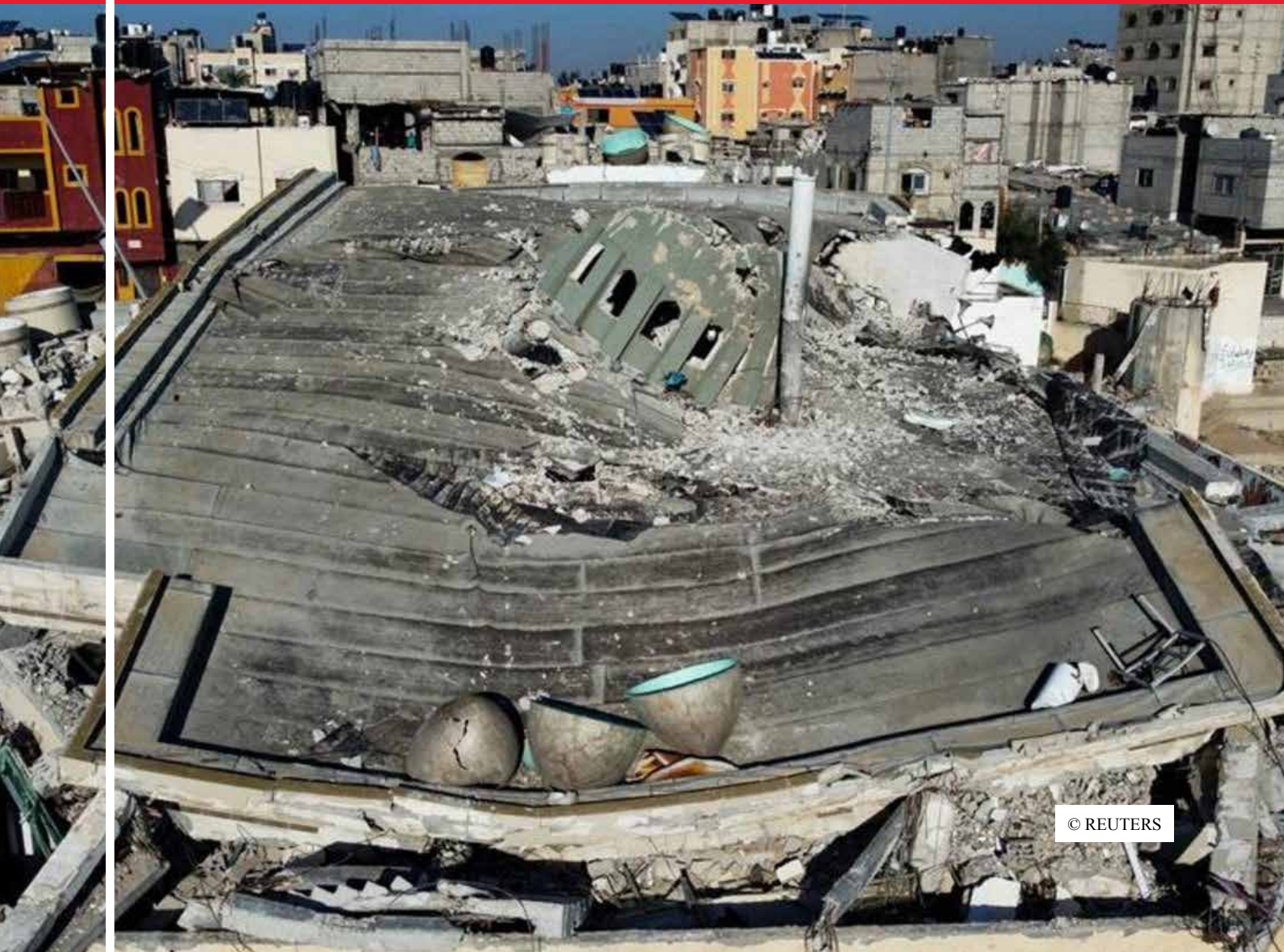
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Destruction of Gaza's Healthcare System Due to the Blockade Since 2007



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01

Destruction of Gaza’s Healthcare System Due to the Blockade Since 2007

Before 7 October 2023, healthcare systems in Gaza were already teetering on the brink, with only 35 hospitals operating at full capacity and a total of 3,412 beds catering to a population exceeding 2 million people.¹

In June 2022, there was less than one month’s supply available of 40% of essential drugs and 20% of medical disposables.²

The dire economic situation in the Gaza Strip, coupled with Israel’s control of borders has resulted in severe shortages in essential medicines, medical equipment, and disposables.³ In 2021, for example, of requests for entry of x-ray/CT spare parts or equipment, 69% were denied.⁴

87 generators are used by Ministry of Health facilities to compensate for the electricity shortage, requiring 300,000 litres of diesel per month with an average rate of eight hours power outage following each eight-hour period of mains electricity.⁵ It costs 2,000 USD per hour of power outage to operate the generators.⁶ The generators have become dilapidated because of their long-term operation and require regular maintenance and spare parts, which are often unavailable due to the blockade.⁷

Movement restriction also prevents health professionals from entering or exiting Gaza.⁸ In 2017, about 85% of health staff applying to travel from Gaza for professional healthcare and medical training were rejected.⁹

There remain human resource gaps, particularly in specialty areas like oncology, where Palestinians need to travel outside of Gaza to receive some treatments – although Israel frequently denies Gazans these health permits.¹⁰ Cancer patients from Gaza initially delayed or denied permits for chemotherapy or radiotherapy from 2015 to 2017 were 1.5 times less likely to survive in the coming months and years.¹¹

As a result of this weakened healthcare system, life expectancy in Gaza is lower and infant and maternal mortality rates are higher compared to other areas in the region.¹² There is a high prevalence of noncommunicable diseases, particularly diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases, which in turn puts more pressure on the healthcare system.¹³

Mental health issues among children and adults are particularly high, driven by numerous factors including recurrent hostilities.¹⁴ Rates of acute and chronic malnutrition are unacceptably high, particularly among children.¹⁵

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Destruction of Gaza's Healthcare System in Previous Israeli Attacks on Gaza



02

Destruction of Gaza's Healthcare System in Previous Israeli Attacks on Gaza

Timeline

2008-9

When Israel began its 'Operation Cast Lead' military campaign in the Gaza Strip in December 2008, the Gaza healthcare system was already crippled by underfunding and a border blockade that prevented needed medical supplies and personnel from entering the region.¹⁶ 25% of drugs categorised as "essential" were out of stock when the bombardment began.¹⁷

The healthcare system soon buckled under the stress of rapidly rising casualties and infrastructure damage.¹⁸ 58 health facilities were damaged or destroyed, 29 ambulances were damaged and destroyed, 16 medical workers were killed, and 25 injured.¹⁹

Among the facilities shelled during Israel's military campaign was the al-Quds Hospital.²⁰ Infrastructure damage amounted to about US\$2 billion to repair.²¹

2012

In Israel's 2012 offensive on Gaza, 16 hospitals and clinics were damaged or destroyed, six ambulances were damaged or destroyed, and 3 medical workers were injured.²²

2014

During Israel's attack in 2014, named 'Operation Protective Edge', 73 hospitals and clinics were damaged or destroyed, 45 ambulances were damaged or destroyed, 23 medical workers were killed, and 78 injured.²³

Al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital was also bombed for over half an hour, effecting the pregnancy and caesarean unit of the hospital in particular.²⁴

2021

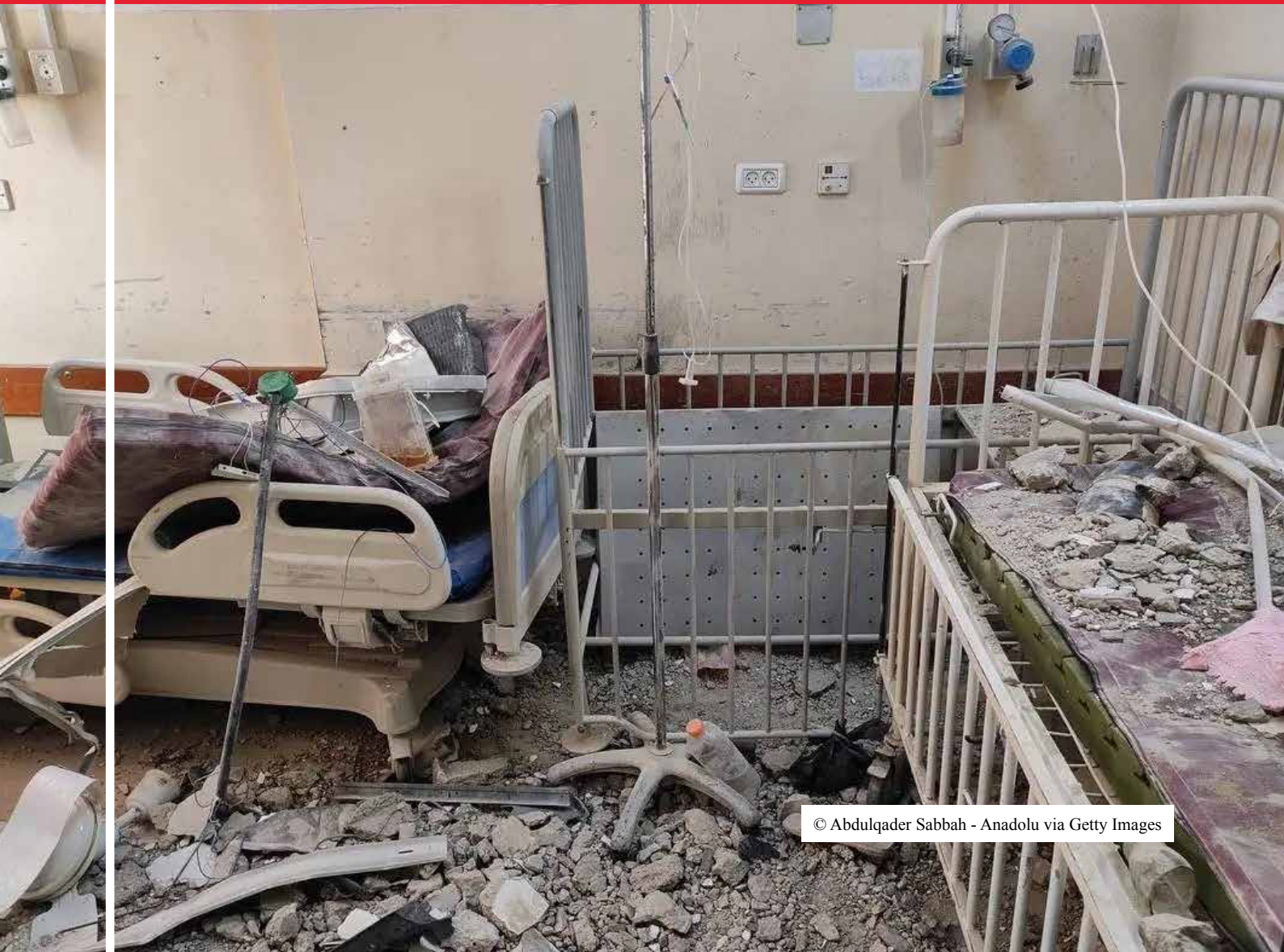
Israeli airstrikes during Israel's attack on Gaza in 2021 damaged nine hospitals and 19 primary healthcare centres in the Gaza Strip.²⁵ The attack also killed two doctors and wounded many other healthcare workers.²⁶

The main COVID-19 testing laboratory was hit by the Israeli forces, resulting in a halt of all COVID-19 testing for several days.²⁷

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Destruction of Hospitals Since 7 October



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03

Destruction of Hospitals Since 7 October

32 hospitals and 53 health centres have been put out of service by the Israeli military, and 155 medical facilities have been destroyed.²⁸ As of February 13 2024, only 11 out of 36 hospitals in Gaza are partially functioning – five in the north and six in the south.²⁹ According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), hospital bed capacity across all of Gaza has now been reduced from 3,500 to just 1,400.³⁰

Between 7 October and 24 November 2023, 30 hospitals and health centres were attacked by Israeli forces, many were attacked multiple times.³¹ At least 521 people, including 16 medical workers, were killed in 137 “attacks on healthcare” in Gaza between 7 October and November 12 2023.³²

More than 600 incidents of violence against, or obstruction of access to, healthcare have been recorded in Gaza since October 2023.³³

In October 2023, Israel bombed al-Ahli Arab hospital, killing over 500 people and injuring hundreds more.³⁴

- The same month, Israeli forces also struck the Indonesian Hospital multiple times, killing at least two civilians.³⁵
- The International Eye Care Centre was struck repeatedly and destroyed after a strike on October 10 or 11.³⁶
- Strikes also hit the compound and vicinity of the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital on October 30 and 31.³⁷ Damage to the hospital, as well as a lack of fuel for hospital generators, resulted in its closure on November 1.³⁸
- Repeated Israeli strikes damaged the al-Quds Hospital and injured a man and child.³⁹

In November 2023, Israel bombed Al-Ahli hospital more than five times, killing more than 22 patients.⁴⁰ Al-Hilo Hospital, which was serving as a designated maternity hospital after the collapse of all other specialist facilities, was also shelled by Israeli forces.⁴¹

In December 2023, an Israeli attack on Nasser Hospital’s maternity ward in southern Gaza killed at least one child and injured three others.⁷⁵

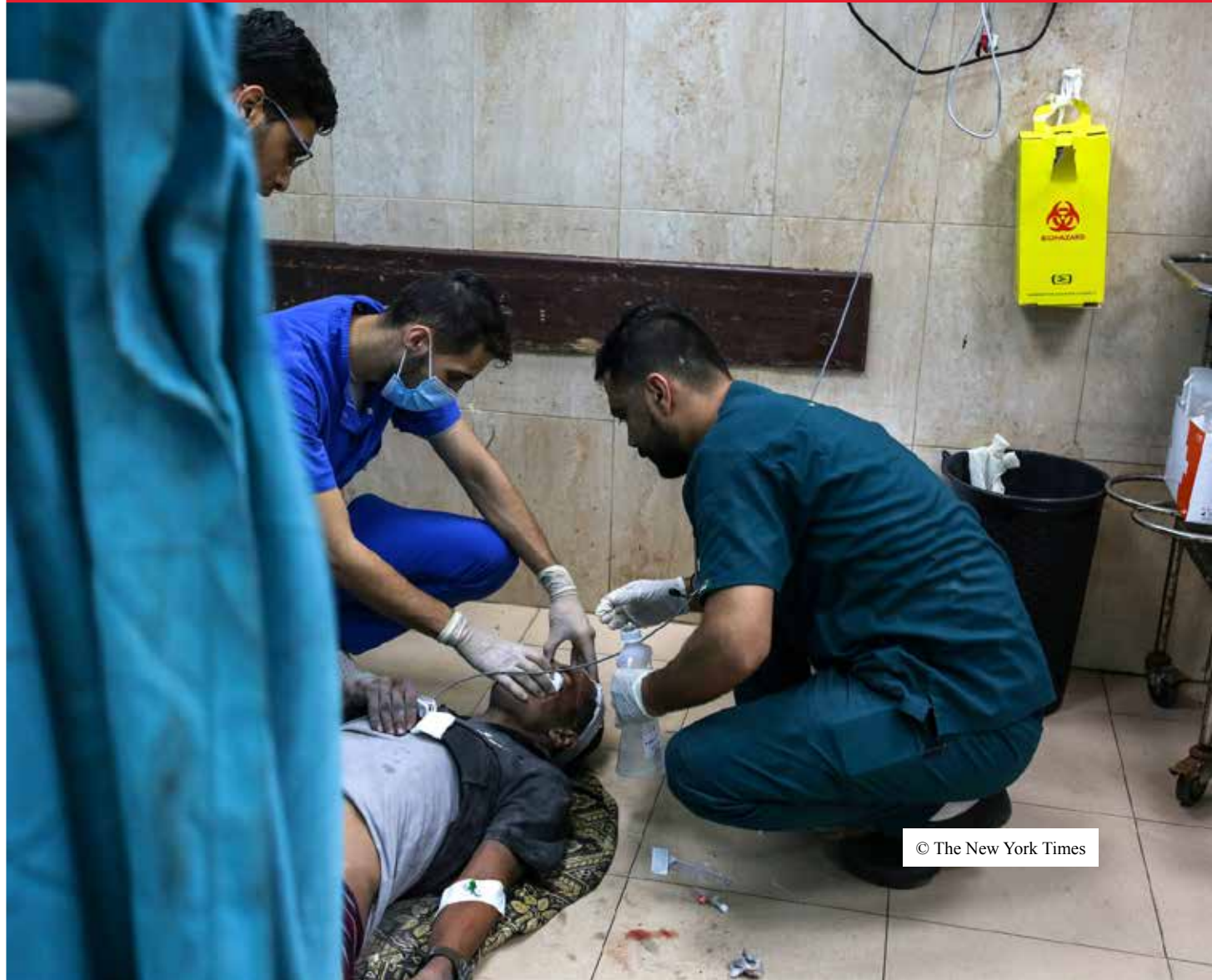
In January 2024, just one day after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) announced its provisional orders, Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres) announced that amid ongoing heavy fighting and bombing in Khan Younis, vital medical services have collapsed at Nasser Hospital.⁴²

In February 2024, Nasser hospital was hit directly by tank fire, killing one Palestinian, and injured eight more.⁷⁶

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Shortages of Medical Equipment Since 7 October



Shortages of Medical Equipment Since 7 October

While Israeli authorities have allowed minimal humanitarian aid into Gaza, they have continued to block the entry of fuel, which hospitals need for their generators.⁴³ WHO reported that “hospitals are on the brink of collapse due to the shortage of electricity, medicine, equipment and specialised personnel”.⁴⁴

Doctors in Gaza have had to carry out operations using torches on mobile phones, and without any anaesthetic or pain relief for patients.⁴⁵ C-sections for pregnant mothers and limb amputations are just some of the medical procedures which have been carried out without any pain relief.⁴⁶

Antiseptics have also run out in Gaza’s hospitals, forcing doctors to use vinegar as a substitute.⁴⁷ When vinegar ran out, patients have become infected, and suffered from blood poisoning, due to the lack of antiseptics.⁴⁸ Wounds which would otherwise have been treatable have resulted in limb amputations to prevent infections.⁴⁹

Between November 11 and 13, three premature babies and 32 other patients died at al-Shifa hospital due to the hospital’s emergency generator running out of power, and lack of medical supplies.⁵⁰ Tin foil was used to try to keep babies alive due to incubators losing power at the hospital.⁵¹

Due to a shortage of medicines, hospital staff, and hospital beds, Gaza’s 2,000 cancer patients have been without treatment and care since 1 November 2023.⁵² The director of the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship hospital, Dr Subhi Sukeyk, has said that “two or three cancer patients” are dying “every day”.⁵³

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Attacks on Gaza's Medical Personnel



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Attacks on Gaza's Medical Personnel

374 health professionals have been killed by Israel, some in targeted assassinations, and a further 269 have been arrested.⁵⁴

126 ambulances were targeted, and about 120 completely destroyed.⁵⁵ Most infamously, Israeli forces bombed the Palestine Red Crescent ambulance trying to rescue six-year-old Hind Rajab, trapped in a car with the dead bodies of her family members, killing the two paramedics onboard.⁵⁶ Israeli forces also killed Hind.⁵⁷

Many health workers have also been kidnapped, including Dr Muhammad Abu Salmiya, the director of Gaza's largest hospital, al-Shifa, who remains missing.⁵⁸

By late December 2023, the number of health workers killed in Gaza had already exceeded the total number of all health worker deaths recorded across all other conflicts globally last year, and in any single year since 2016.⁵⁹

152 UNRWA employees, who also help to administer humanitarian aid, have been killed by Israel's genocide since October.⁶⁰

In December 2023, Israeli forces stormed the Kamal Adwan hospital in northern Gaza and detained its director and medical staff. Israeli snipers shot and killed two women and two children during the attack.⁶¹

- Al Awda hospital was also besieged, and two health staff were shot and killed by Israeli snipers whilst working inside the hospital.⁶² Israeli forces also bombed the water tanks on the roof, making the only available water in the hospital dirty and unsafe to use.⁶³

In early February 2024, Israeli snipers killed over 21 Palestinians inside and around the Nasser hospital medical complex, including the deliberate targeting of a doctor and a nurse inside the hospital.⁶⁴ The nurse was left in critical condition after being shot in the chest.⁶⁵

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Israel's Undermining of Gaza's Health Ministry



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Israel’s Undermining of Gaza’s Health Ministry

Despite the Israeli military’s claims on 5 November 2023 about “ Hamas’ cynical use of hospitals” for their operations, no evidence has been put forward to substantiate these claims, and none would justify depriving hospitals and ambulances of their protected status under international humanitarian law.⁶⁶

In a November news conference, an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) spokesperson alleged that “the Indonesian Hospital is being used by Hamas to hide an underground command and control center”.⁶⁷ The Indonesia-based Medical Emergency Rescue Committee (MER-C), a volunteer group that funds the hospital, disputed the allegations, stating that the only tunnel connected to the hospital was used to send fuel to the hospital’s fuel tank to power its generators.⁶⁸

Israel also insisted Hamas was using al-Shifa hospital as a main operating base, a claim for which no evidence has been provided, and many Palestinians and health organisations have denied.⁶⁹ In mid-November 2023, 650 patients left inside al-Shifa were trapped in a “circle of death” as military vehicles had advanced to the south-eastern gate of the complex near where the maternity ward is located.⁷⁰ Other medics – including those working with Doctors Without Borders – reported that evacuating had been impossible as people had been shot at when trying to leave.⁷¹

Israel has also undermined Gaza’s Health Ministry repeatedly, labelling it as “ Hamas-run”, and disputing its civilian death toll.⁷² These claims were also repeated by US President Joe Biden, who said he has “no confidence” in the Health Ministry’s figures, and became a term widely used by many reputable news organisations, including the BBC and Sky News.⁷³ In response, the Health Ministry released a full list of all people killed in Israel’s attacks, and UN experts and human rights organisations have also rejected Israel’s claims.⁷⁴

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