

Healthcare Facilities and Workers Cannot Be Targets: An Immediate Ceasefire Is Imperative by *Dr Hina J Shahid (NHS) and Dr Daniel Hadley (NHS)* (15th November 2023)

Since October 7th, [over 11,000 people have been killed](#) in Gaza. **Two-thirds of them were women and children and almost half were in southern areas declared ‘safe’ by the Israeli government.** 1.6 million people out of the 2.3 million Gazan population have been internally displaced and **nearly half of all residential homes have been destroyed.**

Despite healthcare facilities carrying a protected status under international law, [Israeli forces are carrying out operations in Gaza’s al-Shifa hospital](#) – as we write. Since October 7th, **over 200 healthcare workers have been killed – 16 whilst on duty.** There have been **130 attacks on health facilities, 50 ambulances have been bombed, and 51 out of 72 primary care units are out of service.** Furthermore, the only specialist hospitals for children, cancer and mental health have ceased operations. **23 hospitals have been ordered to evacuate in Gaza city and North Gaza.**¹

Gaza’s healthcare system has collapsed. Power has been cut and fuel for generators and oxygen has run out: [newborn babies and intensive care patients reliant on ventilators are dying](#). Hospitals have exhausted essential medical supplies and currently, there are [50,000 pregnant women in Gaza: 5000 are due to give birth in the next month](#). The cuts in power, food and water supplies have caused malnutrition and poor sanitation: [risk of waterborne disease and other epidemics have significantly increased](#). Yet, the hospitals remain overcrowded with patients and displaced people.

Forced displacement and collective punishment are illegal under international law and a crime against humanity: leading [human rights organisations](#) and [lawyers](#) are referring to this as **ethnic cleansing.** **We are witnessing the politicisation of aid and weaponization of essential resources:** we cannot continue to be witnesses to such deeply disturbing actions. We must act immediately.

We are also gravely concerned by **the escalating violence in the West Bank: since October 7th, 167 fatalities have been reported** – a quarter of these have been children. Furthermore, **2500 residents have been injured** – 30% of them are children. Increased restrictions on movement within the West Bank have obstructed access for ambulances and mobile clinics, and there has been **reduced access to cancer, dialysis and lifesaving treatments** due to permit refusals by Israeli authorities.²

An unconditional ceasefire by all belligerents must be implemented urgently to protect against further civilian casualties and contain this humanitarian crisis; **humanitarian pauses of a few hours are not practical or sustainable. Essential supplies must be made readily available to healthcare facilities and civilians.**

It is clear that for these cycles of horrific violence to end permanently, **a final resolution to the conflict based on equal rights for Palestinians and Israelis must be negotiated.** The military occupation of the West Bank, the illegal expansion of Israeli settlements, and the blockade of Gaza must end. **The grave violations of international law must be investigated** and brought before the International Criminal Court: politicians of conscience must push for this. Furthermore, the UK Government must not be complicit in crimes against humanity; **rather, the UK must lead diplomatic efforts to ensure that international law is enforced.**

The SNP has tabled an amendment to the passage of the King’s speech **to call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire: we urge all MPs to vote with their consciences today. Vote to call for an immediate ceasefire.**

¹ WHO OTP (8 November 2023), WHO surveillance System on Attacks on Healthcare

² WHO Technical Officer briefing (10 November, 2023)