



Photo credit: Ministry of Health, Occupied Palestinian territory

14 October 2023 – As the United Nation’s agency responsible for public health, the World Health Organization (WHO) strongly condemns Israel's repeated orders for the evacuation of 22 hospitals treating more than 2000 inpatients in northern Gaza. The forced evacuation of patients and health workers will further worsen the current humanitarian and public health catastrophe.

The lives of many critically ill and fragile patients hang in the balance: those in intensive care or who rely on life support; patients undergoing hemodialysis; newborns in incubators; women with complications of pregnancy, and others all face imminent deterioration of their condition or death if they are forced to move and are cut off from life-saving medical attention while being evacuated.

Health facilities in northern Gaza continue to receive an influx of injured patients and are struggling to operate beyond maximum capacity. Some patients are being treated in corridors and outdoors in surrounding streets due to a lack of hospital beds.

Forcing more than 2000 patients to relocate to southern Gaza, where health facilities are already running at maximum capacity and unable to absorb a dramatic rise in the number patients, could be tantamount to a death sentence.

Hospital directors and health workers are now facing an agonizing choice: abandon critically ill patients amid a bombing campaign, put their own lives at risk while remaining on site to treat patients, or endanger their patients’ lives while attempting to transport them to facilities that have no capacity to receive them. Overwhelmingly, care givers have chosen to stay behind, and honor their oaths as health professionals to “do no harm,” rather than risk moving their critically ill patients during evacuations. Health workers should never have to make such impossible choices.

Additionally, tens of thousands of displaced people in northern Gaza are seeking refuge in open spaces in or around hospitals, treating them as havens from violence as well as to protect the facilities from potential attacks. Their lives, too, are at risk when health facilities are bombed.

There are verified reports of deaths of health care workers and destruction of health facilities, which denies civilians the basic human right of life-saving health care and is prohibited under International Humanitarian Law.

WHO calls for Israel to immediately reverse evacuation orders to hospitals in northern Gaza, and calls for the protection of health facilities, health workers, patients, and civilians. WHO also reiterates its calls for the immediate and safe delivery of medical supplies, fuel, clean water, food, and other humanitarian aid into Gaza through the Rafah crossing, where life-saving assistance – including WHO health supplies that arrived earlier today – is currently awaiting entry.

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