

5 March 2020, Gaza Strip - Today the World Health Organization in partnership with the Ministry of Health launched a Limb Reconstruction Centre for Gaza Strip, providing hundreds of Palestinians injured with gunshot wounds, with permanent specialized and centralised care.

Based at Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Yunis and generously funded with UK aid, EU humanitarian aid, by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, the new Centre features a 32-bed ward, two dedicated operating theatres, and 25 specialized multidisciplinary staff (including four orthopedic surgeons, psychologists and physiotherapists).

"The Limb Reconstruction Centre is a new centre of care and excellence, which will provide better quality, faster and more sophisticated treatment and rehabilitation to patients with gunshot injuries sustained during the Great March of Return. It will cater for a wide range of patient needs from wound care, surgery, infection control and physiotherapy to mental health support," said Dr Gerald Rockenschaub, WHO's Head of Office for the occupied Palestinian territory.

"This Centre will help transform the lives of those affected by preventing disabilities and amputations, and also restore dignity and hope to those patients who have been left powerless, unable to function and support their families and communities in what is already a difficult environment," said Mr Jamie McGoldrick, Humanitarian Coordinator for the oPt.

Since the start of the Great March of Return in the Gaza Strip from March 2018 to 31 December 2019, 33,141 injuries and 322 deaths (including 65 children) have been reported. More than 7,951 suffered from gunshot wounds, and 88% of these presented limb wounds.

"The Great March of Return demonstrations in the Gaza Strip, has not only caused tremendous suffering for many families in Gaza but also has placed enormous strain on Gaza's already under-resourced and over-burdened health care system. Gaza health facilities are facing a critical shortage of essential medicines and supplies, as well as a lack of specialised doctors and nurses. This new Centre will help to address some of these challenges through providing specialised treatment and support for patients requiring limb reconstruction surgery," said the EU Representative Sven Kohn von Burgsdorff.

"Today is yet another occasion to recall that the situation in Gaza remains fragile and unpredictable. It is the time to turn the page. Only a political solution can bring fundamental change and put an end to the violence, suffering and hardship," he added.

Six hundred patients have already been identified as being in need of limb reconstruction surgery (according to the Ministry of Health as of February 2020) and hundreds more wait to be assessed. Already more than 40 patients have been operated on since the Centre began operation in December 2019.

Gunshot injuries are complicated, expensive and difficult to treat: they can take up to two years to treat per patient; involve four to five surgeries for bone, muscles, soft tissue and nerves; and often involve serious bone infections. Rates of bone infection are extortionately high and an increasing number of patients are showing signs of antibiotic resistance, which increases the chance of amputation and the risk of infection to other patients. A dedicated osteomyelitis (bone infection) treatment centre, built by Médecins Sans Frontières-France in 2020, will be located adjacent to the Limb Reconstruction Centre and complement it.

While there have been medical missions for limb reconstruction in Gaza in the past, there hasn't been a centralised service which provides permanent and dedicated operating theatres and resources from a multidisciplinary team. This Centre will help coordinate specialized limb reconstruction treatment to rationalize human resources, time, equipment and costs and also establish a patient database to unify information used by all partners deploying emergency medical teams for limb reconstruction services. The Limb Reconstruction Center will also facilitate much-needed training to upskill Gaza's medical professionals, paving the way for a new generation of trained medical professionals in Gaza. Visiting specialist medical teams will focus their interventions in a centralized structure, maximizing training opportunities for younger resident staff.

Also at Nasser Medical Complex, WHO has installed a CT Scanner, funded by EU humanitarian aid, which will benefit an estimated 11,000 patients per year.

#### Background information:

The Limb Reconstruction Centre is a vital part of WHO's trauma and emergency care programme, which is working with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and partners on an extensive series of interventions that aim to improve the management of traumatic injuries, from the point of injury, at the prehospital level all the way to hospital care, including emergency departments and surgery, to rehabilitation and recovery. With the generous support of donors, since the start of GMR demonstrations in 2018, this programme has helped establish and upgrade 10 Trauma Stabilization Points (TSPs) in critical zones in Gaza with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and MoH to reduce the burden on the overloaded hospitals substantially. At the TSPs, wounded patients receive life-saving care close to the point of injury and saved on average 1200 lives in a year (from 30 March 2018 to 30 March 2019).

As part of the trauma pathway, in 2020 WHO will:

upgrade six trauma hospitals in Gaza and four in the West Bank to create a trauma response network, providing a range of interventions, from improved infrastructure, provision of supplies, training and clinical coaching for all doctors and nurses working at the emergency departments

build on the success of the TSPs, by expanding them to the Eastern Mediterranean region to respond to conflict related trauma in the region

support the PCRS to centralize all ambulance movements through a new ambulance dispatch centre

provide training for surgeons on acute surgery in the six trauma hospitals to improve damage control surgery through basic principles of control of haemorrhage, prevention of contamination and protection from further injury

provide training to PRCS and MoH staff to provide frontline care in an acute emergency

support the running costs and supplies for the Limb Reconstruction Centre.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is appealing for US\$ 20 million over three years to provide life- and limb-saving interventions to large numbers of injured patients and to build on the previous success of the WHO supported interventions and ensure better health outcomes for Palestinians through strengthened continuum of care along the trauma pathway.

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