



Press statement - Unimpeded access of medical supplies needed for Gaza

1 June 2010 | JERUSALEM -- The World Health Organization renews a call to allow for the unimpeded access into the Gaza Strip of life-saving medical supplies, including equipment and medicines, as well as more effective movement of people in and out of the territory for medical training and the repair of devices needed to deliver appropriate healthcare.

Hundreds of items of equipment have been waiting to enter Gaza for up to a year, procured by WHO and other organizations, says Mr Tony Laurance, head of WHO's office for Gaza and the West Bank. These items include CT scanners, x-rays, fluoroscopes, infusion pumps, medical sterilization gasses, laboratory equipment, UPS (uninterrupted power supply) batteries, and spare parts for support systems like elevators.

"It is impossible to maintain a safe and effective healthcare system under the conditions of siege that have been in place now since June 2007," Mr Laurance says. "It is not enough to simply ensure supplies like drugs and consumables. Medical equipment and spare parts must be available and be properly maintained."

The various challenges posed by the siege that impact on the health situation, and delivery of health care in Gaza, include:

- The inability for medical staff to leave Gaza for training impacts greatly on the level of health care available for Gazans. Similarly, medical technicians are often unable to acquire the latest expertise to maintain hospital equipment, much of which falls into disrepair due to spare parts not being available. This results in the costly purchase of new equipment.
- The private sector which supplies and maintains equipment must operate with some degree of efficiency, particularly by being able to get staff and equipment in and out of Gaza.
- Most medical equipment must be tested regularly for safety, for example defibrillators must be tested twice a year. The instruments needed for checking must be recalibrated annually in specialized laboratories outside Gaza. But the inability to send such equipment outside the Strip means it has not been possible to conduct such tests to ensure the safety of equipment.

"Such disruptions and the fragmented supply chain brings an unpredictability in scheduling life-saving procedures at a time and place when they are needed to save lives," Mr Laurance says.

- Disrupted power, water and sanitation services greatly impact on the delivery of healthcare and consequent health conditions for Gazans.
- Gaza's second biggest hospital, the Gaza-European Hospital, operates without 2 out of its 3 elevators not functioning due to disrepair.

- All hospitals have been waiting for over 6 months to get spare parts to repair their main sterilizers.
- Spare parts needed for the cardiac catheterization laboratories in the Gaza-European Hospital have been waiting to enter for 6 months.
- There are often shortages essential medicines, with 15%–20% of such drugs commonly out of stock.
- Many specialized treatments (e.g. for complex heart surgery and certain types of cancer) are unavailable in the Gaza Strip. Many patients who are referred for treatment to hospitals outside Gaza have had their applications for exit permits denied or delayed by Israeli authorities and have missed their appointments. Several have died while waiting for referral.

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