



20 August 2017 – Dr Abdul-Kareem Qasem, a pediatric surgeon in Al-Sabeen Hospital in Sana’a, vividly remembers the moment when his head was bleeding following a blast that also resulted in damage to the hospital where he was working.

Since 2003, Dr Qasem has worked with sick and injured children at the Al-Sabeen Hospital, but he never expected he would be injured while working in his section at the hospital.

“At that moment, I really realized what it means to be an injured,” he recalled. “I felt as if it was an earthquake when a bomb hit a house just near the hospital 2 years ago. Glass from the building flew to my head and my face was covered with blood.”

For 14 years, Dr Qasem has worked under different difficult circumstances, but the current situation is becoming “unbearable.”

“We were already under suffocating crisis but the ongoing one is totally different. We are not only working under shortage of medicines and lack of regular salaries, but the security problems have also added heavy burden on us,” he explained.

Since March 2015, the security situation has further exacerbated in Yemen. Several doctors, according to Dr Qasem, couldn’t have chosen to leave and have taken offers to work outside the country.

For his part, Dr Qasem says “I will not leave my country under any circumstances. I had been studying medicines for 15 years outside Yemen to return to my country and dedicate my expertise to save the people of Yemen. I will not allow any wound to prevent me from doing my job and serving patients.”

In addition to his main work in the hospital, Dr Qasem responds to the distress calls made by public hospitals during mass casualty incidents. “We cannot see the injured in need while we stand silent. If we don’t help our people and serve the country during these exceptional conditions so when we will.”

Over the last 2 and a half years, Dr Qasem has noticed the gradual deterioration of the financial situation of patients. Some ask to be exempted from even the very low, almost token, fees for the health services.

“Our living conditions as doctors are also worsening. We’ve not received our salaries for one year and I couldn’t even pay for the rent of my apartment,” he says.

Al-Sabeen Hospital in Sana’a is just one of more than 350 health facilities that have been partially or fully damaged by the conflict since 2010.

“Unfortunately, the health facilities and medical personnel in Yemen have fallen victims to this war. My message to the national and international warring parties is to respect medical workers and health facilities. They must know that we provide health services to all people regardless of political and geographical considerations.”

An estimated 30 000 critical health workers have not been paid their salaries in nearly a year. WHO and UNICEF are paying incentives, travel costs, overtime or other allowances where possible, but call on authorities to pay health workers, without whom health care is impossible to deliver.

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