24 November 2023, Geneva/Cairo - On 22 November, in cooperation with the Palestine Red Crescent Society, WHO participated in another joint-UN mission to transfer 151 patients, relatives and health workers accompanying them from Al-Shifa hospital in northern Gaza. The mission was undertaken following specific requests from health authorities and hospital officials in Gaza.

This was the third mission to Al-Shifa carried out by WHO, other UN agencies and partners in less than a week; the first was an assessment mission (18 November) and the second was an

evacuation mission to transport 31 infants (19 November).

During this mission, the team transferred 73 severely ill or injured patients, including 18 dialysis patients; 26 patients with serious spinal injuries; 8 patients with severe chronic conditions; two in need of critical care; and 19 patients in wheelchairs. The patients were transported in 14 ambulances supplied and staffed by the Palestine Red Crescent Society, and two buses, with 8 health workers and 70 family members accompanying them.

This was a high-risk mission, as intense fighting and shelling continued in proximity of Al-Shifa hospital.

It took 20 hours for the team to complete the evacuation, including 6 hours at a checkpoint where the team and patients were screened by the Israeli Defense Force. This was despite an initial agreement to only screen participants at the origination point in Al-Shifa Hospital.

The screening process involved checks on the patients, their relatives, and the personnel; these included elderly, children and severely ill patients. Three medical personnel from the Palestine Red Crescent Society and three from the Ministry of Health were detained.

After 6 hours at the security checkpoint, the convoy proceeded as the condition of some of patients was already deteriorating. Patients reached their final destination late at night.

Most of the patients were ultimately transferred to the European Gaza Hospital, with the dialysis patients admitted to Al Najjar Hospital. Both facilities are in the south of Gaza.

WHO is extremely concerned about the safety of the estimated 100 patients and health workers remaining at Al-Shifa. Due to the limited time that the mission members were able to spend in the hospital and the urgency of moving the most critical, it was difficult to determine exactly how many remain.

Two of the six detained health workers have reportedly been released. We do not have information about the well-being of the four remaining health staff, including the director of Al-Shifa hospital. WHO calls for their legal and human rights to be fully observed during their detention.

This and other evacuations were requested by health authorities, health workers and patients, and became necessary as Al-Shifa Hospital is no longer able to function due to lack of water, fuel, medical supplies, food, and staff, and recent military incursions.

Also on 21 November, WHO and partners undertook a mission to Al-Ahli Hospital in northern Gaza to assess medical priorities. Al-Ahli, which is one of the only functional hospitals in the north, must be urgently and regularly supplied with fuel, water, food and medical supplies to ensure the continuity of care. Today, 22 patients along with 19 companions arrived at the European Gaza hospital, in the transfer mission undertaken with the Palestine Red Crescent Society, following the assessement mission.

WHO again asks all relevant authorities to ensure that the medical evacuations that WHO has been requested to assist in can proceed safely, under agreed procedures, without endangering the lives of patients. Ultimately, the safety, security and evacuation decisions rest with the relevant authorities.

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