Dr Richard Peeperkorn, WHO Representative on the occupied Palestinian territory
Sean Casey, WHO Emergency Medical Teams coordinator

Yesterday, 20 December 2023, in another high-risk joint mission, a team from the World Health Organization (WHO) and other UN partners, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), reached Al Ahli Arab hospital and Al Shifa hospital in the north of Gaza.

The initial plan was to deliver fuel to both facilities, but had to shift to supplies only due to lack of safety guarantees in place and clearance issues.

Our teams delivered 7 pallets of medical supplies for surgery and wound treatment, supplies to support women during birth delivery, IV fluids and medicines. They witnessed the impact of the recent attacks on both health facilities and the level of destruction.

Our staff are running out of words to describe the beyond catastrophic situation facing remaining patients and health workers.

WHO had visited Al Ahli Arab hospital over a week ago and it already looked like utter chaos, completely congested and a disaster zone but it was still partly operational and there were still operating theatres and two health specialists were constantly managing surgeries. Now, Al Ahli is a shell of a hospital. Until two days ago, it was the only hospital where injured people could get surgery in northern Gaza and it was overwhelmed with patients needing emergency care. But there are no operating theatres anymore due to the lack of fuel, power, medical supplies and health workers, including surgeons and other specialists. It has completely stopped functioning and is only operating as a hospice currently, with no or very little care services provided.

Only 9 out of 36 health facilities are partially functional for the whole of Gaza. All of these in the south. There are no functional hospitals left in the north. Al Ahli was the last one but is now minimally functioning, i.e. still treating patients but not admitting new ones, along with Al-Shifa,

Al Awda and Al Sahaba hospitals. These hospitals are still sheltering thousands of displaced people.

At Al Ahli, about 10 staff, all junior doctors and nurses, continue to provide basic first aid, pain management as much as possible, wound care and trauma stabilization services. 80 injured patients - a week ago there were still 250 patients there - including elderly, women and small children, are sheltering in a church within the hospital grounds and its orthopaedic section. Many of these patients have lost family members and don't have anyone to bring them water or food. Some of them are severely injured and have been waiting for surgery for two weeks, or have been operated on but are now at risk of post-operation infection due to lack of antibiotics and other drugs. All these patients cannot move and need to be transferred urgently, to have a chance to survive.

Bodies from recent attacks are lined up in the courtyard as they can't be given safe and dignified burials.

More than 20 Al Ahli hospital staff were arrested on 18 December. Six were released and forced to move to the south. There are no information regarding the remaining ones under detention. WHO reiterates its call for all parties to the conflict to respect International Humanitarian Law, and for the protection of health workers, patients, health facilities, and ambulances at all times.

WHO will keep striving to supply health facilities in northern Gaza. But without fuel, staff, and other essential needs, medicines won't make a difference and all patients will die slowly and painfully.

Over 20,000 people have now been killed in the hostilities in Gaza. This is almost 1% of the entire population.

WHO calls again for a humanitarian ceasefire. This is needed now to reinforce and restock remaining health facilities, deliver medical services needed by thousands of injured people and those needing other essential care, and, above all, to stop the bloodshed and death.

Background:

Fatalities and casualties:

In Gaza (data as of 21 Dec): close to 20,000 deaths (according to Gaza media office), 70% children and women, nearly 8000 children killed; over 52,500 injuries

7600 missing and/or under rubble.

136 UNRWA colleagues killed since the start of hostilities

At least 198 Palestinian medics killed, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health.

In West Bank: 291 deaths, close to 30% being children, 3600 injuries.

In Gaza: Over 1.9 million or 85% of population estimated to be displaced, half of whom are children, including over 1.4 million taking shelter in UNRWA facilities and other public venues, including hospitals.

In the West Bank: Since 7 October, 2000 people displaced

Health needs:

Only 9/36 of health facilities are partially functional for the whole of Gaza.

South: 9 partially functioning health facilities. Only three hospitals in the south have surgical capacity.

The two major hospitals in southern Gaza operating at three times their bed capacity.

Occupancy rates are now reaching 206% in inpatient departments and 250% in ICUs, and in addition providing shelter to thousands of IDPs.

There are 2 field hospitals fully functional in the south (run by Jordan and UAE EMTs) with 200 beds combined.

North: Hospitals in the north are almost entirely shut down. 4 hospitals are minimally functioning, i.e. still treating patients but not admitting new ones. These hospitals are providing first aid to patients already inside the hospital, with very limited capacity and no fuel to operate the hospital.

Only 38% of pre-conflict hospital beds are available. Hospitals are seeing patients well beyond their bed capacity.

Only 30% of original health staff pre-escalation are working.

oPt: 493 health attacks confirmed in oPt:

Gaza (as of 20 Dec): 246 attacks in the Gaza Strip have resulted in 582 fatalities and 748 injuries. The attacks have affected 61 health care facilities (including 26 hospitals damaged out of 36) and affected 76 ambulances (including 38 which sustained damage)

West Bank (as of 15 Dec): 251 attacks in the West Bank have resulted in 7 fatalities and 45 injuries. The attacks have affecting 20 health facilities and 193 ambulances. During these attacks there were 157 incidents involved obstruction to health care delivery, 133 incidents involved use of force, 36 incidents involved detention and 32 incidents involved search of an ambulance.

Previous statements:

WHO delivers health supplies to Al-Shifa Hospital, appeals for continued access to address urgent needs in north Gaza, 17 December 2023

WHO calls for protection of humanitarian space in Gaza following serious incidents in high-risk mission to transfer patients, deliver health supplies, 12 December 2023

Sunday 7th of July 2024 05:21:52 AM