Cairo, Geneva, Jerusalem, 23 January 2024 – WHO and partners completed another high-risk mission on Monday to resupply fuel to the Al-Shifa Hospital in northern Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of people remain cut off from aid. Across the Gaza Strip, the few remaining hospitals find themselves in ever more dire circumstances, with hostilities often preventing access for patients and supplies, and health workers managing on little rest and scarce supplies.

The mission was carried out along with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, and Médecins Sans Frontières.

The last humanitarian mission to northern Gaza took place on 12 January.

Yesterday‘s mission, which delivered 19 000 liters of fuel to Al-Shifa Hospital, faced delays at the checkpoint. The roads leading to the hospital were severely damaged, and the desperation in northern Gaza was apparent, as thousands of civilians surrounded the UN vehicles and fuel truck in the hopes of finding food and water, also delaying the mission.

In Al-Shifa Hospital, the mission saw that the functionality has improved since the last visit ten days ago. A significant decrease in the number of displaced people, from 40 000 to 10 000 was observed. There are 120 health and care workers, and 300 patients. The hospital conducts 5-10 surgeries daily, mainly trauma cases that require immediate care.

Essential services such as basic laboratory and radiological facilities remain operational, along with emergency care, a surgical unit with three operation theaters, post-operative care, and a dialysis unit. There are plans to reopen a 9-bed ICU over the coming days.

There are no maternity or pediatric services, and shortages of specialized doctors, medicines, and medical supplies such as orthopedic equipment. These units could become operational again, but will require a consistent supply of fuel, oxygen, medical supplies, and other aid.

The hospital’s primary oxygen plant has been destroyed. They are relying on a smaller plant.

Seven out of 24 hospitals remain open in northern Gaza. These are only partially functioning, without enough specialized medical staff to manage the volume and range of injuries, nor sufficient medicines and medical supplies, fuel, clean water, or food for patients or staff. Additionally, two Ministry of Health primary healthcare centers in northern Gaza are partially functional but lack essential supplies, including syringes and vaccines needed for routine immunization.

Intensified military presence and hostilities in southern Gaza are also placing patients and health workers at risk, and compromising access to health care. They are severely obstructing the movement of health workers, ambulances, and health partners' ability to resupply hospitals, eroding their functionality. WHO staff say the situation for hospitals in Khan Yunis is “catastrophic and indescribable.”

In southern Gaza, which used to have 12 hospitals, only 7 remain partially functional. A further two, Al-Kheir Hospital and Nasser Medical Complex, are only minimally functional and now inaccessible.

WHO is extremely concerned about reports of Al-Kheir Hospital, a small NGO-run hospital with around 30 beds, facing military incursions and several health workers being detained. Communication with the hospital is no longer possible.

Due to evacuation orders in neighborhoods surrounding Nasser Medical Complex--the largest hospital in the south--and continuous hostilities in the vicinity of the hospital, the Ministry of Health reports that large numbers of wounded people are on the hospital grounds.

An international emergency medical team deployed at Nasser says that no one can enter or exit the facility due to ongoing bombardment close by.

Health staff are reported to be digging graves on hospital grounds due to the large numbers of deaths anticipated and the need to manage dead bodies. This horrifying situation should never take place in any hospital.

Hostilities around Al-Amal Hospital are risking the facility becoming non-functional, as ambulances and injured patients reportedly cannot access the facility.

WHO again calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, active protection of civilians and health care, and sustained access for the delivery of critical aid across the Strip.

Note: reference to a partner was removed at their request.

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Sunday 7th of July 2024 05:40:13 AM