

PHRI Emergency Delegation to the Gaza Strip

April 16, 2018

Dear friends

Physicians for Human Rights Israel's delegation returned from the Gaza Strip after providing medical treatment to 380 patients and operating on 15 of them: "In the most advanced hospital in Gaza it felt like the 1970s. If things remain this way, most gunshot casualties will have to undergo amputation".

On Thursday, April 12, a delegation of Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) entered the Gaza Strip for an emergency visit to provide what little help they could to the local health system faced with a massive influx of injured demonstrators, on top of its ordinary patients. The delegation members left Gaza the following day, apart for vascular surgeon Dr. Jamal Hijazi of Shaare Tzedek Medical Center in Jerusalem, who remained in the European Hospital for four days to help the local staff treat dozens of injured patients. Dr. Hijazi was horrified by the conditions under which the local medical staff work:

"We're talking about the lack in the most basic instruments. For instance, Doppler [pulse device], which is essential for determining whether the blood flows and reaches the feet. So the medical staff try to feel around according to body heat. You feel like you have been thrown into the desert and told to treat the injured. Even in a field hospital the situation is better than in the hospitals in the Strip".

"In the hospital where I worked, for example, there's no antibiotics. The patients are told to arrive from home with the antibiotics they have bought in advance. There was a situation where I had to use a sewing thread. Very fine sewing threads are unavailable, you must improvise with thicker threads. There are no disinfectants, sometimes we disinfect by washing with saline solution rather than a disinfectant. You operate on someone and you may succeed in the operation, but there is high likelihood for the patient to be infected because the entire environment has not been properly disinfected".

The other doctors on the delegation worked in Shifa Hospital in Gaza City and in Dar al-Salam Hospital in Khan Younes. The delegation included pediatrician Dr. Raid Haj Yahya, orthopedic surgeon Dr. Mustafa Yassin, diabetician Dr. Arin Haj Yahya, liver and kidney transplant surgeon Dr.

Abed Khalaileh, and psychologist Dr. Mahmoud Said. The delegation was headed by PHRI's Salah Haj Yahya.

The delegation members treated 380 patients and performed 15 orthopedic and vascular operations. The delegation also supplied Gaza with medical equipment for orthopedic surgery: external stabilizers and implants for thigh and knee replacement surgery worth \$40,000. The delegation also brought insulin received through direct donations and various medicines.

The hardships in the Gaza Strip, and particularly in its health system, are the result of an 11-year siege imposed by Israel, as well as of the recurring outbreaks of fighting and the destruction these entail. They are also caused by the severe crisis in the relations between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, which leads to denial of funding and deliveries of medical supplies and medicines by the former – at the expense of the civilians in the Gaza Strip.

Delegation director Haj Yahya returned with a heavy heart: "The impact of the siege and the crisis between the Authority and Hamas in Gaza is felt in every aspect. Both the poverty on the streets and people's despair and the conditions we come across in the hospitals, when we are told that 45% of the medical equipment for emergency and operating rooms are missing. On Thursday night, they began discharging injured patients only because they had to prepare the hospitalization rooms for the new casualties. When we spoke with the injured, some of them told us that they were hit while standing with their back to the fence, and at a distance of 700 and 800 meters from it".

As an NGO, we do the best we can, but we are well aware that this is a drop in the ocean, and that what is required is real change on the leadership level – Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, Egypt and the international community – if we want to protect and respect the lives and human rights of all those living in the region, in Gaza as in Israel.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/phri-emergency-delegation-gaza-strip>