



The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), Al-Haq and Al Mezan Center for Human Rights demand an end to the devastating human rights and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, where thousands of Palestinians are stranded in areas where the Israeli occupying forces (IOF) are deployed, unable to move amid Israel's indiscriminate and relentless targeting and bombings of Palestinian civilians and civilian objects. The gravity of the situation is underscored by the Israeli military's persistent denial of access to the Civil Defense (Gaza's primary search-and-rescue force), the Palestine Red Crescent Society and the International Committee of the Red Cross teams to the IOF-deployed areas, hindering the crucial delivery of medical aid and/or the evacuation of injured or killed Palestinians. According to the Civil Defense in the Gaza Strip, the total number of [reports](#) of missing persons due to Israel's bombardment of the northern and southern areas of the Gaza Strip has exceeded 8,000.

When medical and rescue teams have tried to reach those areas, both with and without prior coordination with the Israeli occupying authorities, they have been targeted. The Palestinian Civil Defense has been badly hit, with 35 workers [killed](#) and over 100 others injured since 7 October 2023. On 15 December 2023, three Civil Defense workers, along with Al-Jazeera's cameraman, Samer Abu-Daqq, were targeted and killed by the Israeli military while trying to evacuate a family trapped in one of the houses being targeted by the IOF near the Farhana school in the middle of Khan Younis city. Notably, this attack occurred even after permission to enter the area had been granted by the IOF, demonstrating the grave risks faced by those involved in life-saving medical and rescue work. ^[٥٥] The Ministry of Health in Gaza [reported](#) that since 7 October 2023, at least 286 health workers have been killed and that 57 ambulances have been hit and damaged. Several health workers have also been [subject](#) to arbitrary detention.

Palestinian rescue teams are hampered by the absence of essential equipment, or fuel to operate that equipment, which is crucial for rescuing individuals or recovering bodies from buildings that have been targeted with their inhabitants still inside. Further, many Palestinians wounded by Israeli fire or airstrikes or trapped under the rubble endure prolonged suffering and eventually die because of Israel's intentional and deliberate denial of access to assistance. Al-Jazeera's cameraman, Samer Abu Daqq, was [left](#) injured, bleeding and without treatment for over five hours before he succumbed to his wounds, because the IOF refused to allow any rescue teams to reach him.

In several cases documented by our organizations, civilians were killed and wounded by Israeli fire while attempting to assist the injured. Below is a testimony provided by one of PCHR's field workers describing an incident that involved some of his family members in Al-Satar Al-Gharbi area in Khan Younis:

'On 7 December 2023, my brother, Imad Abdel Ghafour, called while trapped in a house in Al-Satar Al-Gharbi area in Khan Yunis, where the IOF had been operating militarily on the ground for two days. He urgently sought assistance in sending an ambulance because my other brother, Samir Abdel Ghafour, had been injured while trying to provide help to his neighbor, who was screaming. My family went to the Red Crescent and Red Cross, requesting their intervention, but they told them that this was not possible because of the presence of the IOF in the area and lack of coordination. Later, communication with Imad was completely cut off and he no longer answered his mobile phone. In the evening of the same day, a neighbor informed me that there were four martyrs in the street, including Samir and his son, who tried to go out to help him, along with two other neighbors, and that they were exposed to gunfire from the IOF.'

'He also said that Israeli warplanes bombed three houses belonging to Samir and two of his brothers in the area. Until this moment, we do not know the fate of those who were inside these houses. If they were injured, they may have succumbed to their wounds, and the raids may have killed them directly. Even if they have survived, they have been without any food or water for many days. All our attempts to find out what happened to them failed. There are around 27 people [who were present in these three houses], and they include elderly people, children, and women. No one can reach the area.'

Our organizations have monitored and documented incidents in which injured Palestinians, trapped in IOF-deployed areas, have succumbed to their wounds and died due to Israel's refusal to allow ambulances to reach them. Tarek Beseiso, a father of two children who were killed and another who was injured in Al-Remal neighborhood of Gaza City, told PCHR's lawyer:

'My son, Ahmed, 16 years old, was killed by a raid on our house on Thursday, 7 December 2023, and my two other children, Mohammed, 8 years old, and Sarah, 17 years old, were wounded. We buried Ahmed in our neighbors' garden, which had been targeted prior to our home, as there was no way we could reach any cemetery. Today, Mohammed succumbed to his wounds and passed away. For five days, we saw Mohammed dying in front of us and were not able to take him to any hospital due to the constant bombing. For five days, all the international and local institutions and organizations were unable to evacuate him because his house is situated in the Al-Rimal neighborhood, where the occupying forces continue to commit their heinous crimes against civilians and prevent civil defense vehicles and ambulances from reaching the area. We appeal to you to help us to evacuate our girl, Sarah, to any hospital before she dies of her wounds.'

These two instances are emblematic of hundreds, if not thousands, of similar cases across the Gaza Strip. In these dire circumstances, civilians find themselves unable to access any kind of medical treatment for their injuries, while rescue teams are unable to reach areas to provide help to the wounded, including those under the rubble, or to retrieve the bodies of those killed. In certain areas, thousands of Palestinian bodies remain under the rubble and on the streets, inaccessible and unretrieved. This not only leaves their families in anguish, unable to ascertain their whereabouts and grieve properly, but also presents a significant risk of the spread of serious diseases among the population.

According to our field researchers, any bodies that could be retrieved from beneath the rubble due to the efforts of those on the scene had to be buried in the closest available locations – such as gardens, marketplaces and roadway medians (central reservations). This serves as yet another stark demonstration of Israel's complete disregard for the lives of Palestinian people and its blatant disrespect for the dignity of the deceased.

It is bad enough that Israel has killed more than 18,000 Palestinians – the vast majority of them are women and children – wounded over 50,000 Palestinians, displaced around 1.9 million Palestinians and erased entire neighborhoods from the map. Those who are injured in areas where the IOF are deployed must endure further suffering before ultimately succumbing to their wounds.

Under international humanitarian law, the wounded and sick, whether military or civilian, needing medical attention and who are not, or no longer, taking part in hostilities, must be respected, protected and cared for in all circumstances. This includes the provision of adequate medical care as far as is practicable and with the least possible delay.

Failing to take action, whether by letting wounded persons die due to lack of care that could have saved their lives, or by allowing protected persons to starve to death, amounts to wilful killing and/or causing great suffering or serious injury to the body or to health. Such actions are deemed war crimes, constituting grave breaches of the Geneva Convention,⁴ and fall under the jurisdiction of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. In certain circumstances, the denial of medical treatment may constitute cruel or inhuman treatment, an outrage upon personal dignity – in particular humiliating and degrading treatment – or even torture if the necessary criteria are met.

Moreover, Israel has a duty not to impede the provision of care by preventing the passage of medical personnel. Israel must facilitate access to the wounded and sick and provide the necessary assistance and protection to medical personnel.

In light of Israel's repeated and persistent denial of access to medical and rescue teams in IOF-deployed areas, and of the IOF's targeting of ambulances and medical personnel, recognized as protected persons under international humanitarian law, we call on the international community, and particularly Third States, to:

- Promptly intervene and mobilize to enforce an immediate ceasefire, and to push Israel to reinstate the supply of water, food, electricity and fuel, as well as medical and humanitarian aid, necessary for the survival of the protected population;
- Act in line with their obligations under the Genocide Convention, in the face of the unfolding genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, by unilaterally and collectively taking all feasible action to urgently and definitively ensure that Israel refrains from further incitement to genocide and from the perpetration of conduct prohibited under Article II of the Convention;
- Publicly call on and exert pressure on Israel to adhere to its legal obligations, including permitting medical and rescue teams – including those from the Civil Defense, the Palestine Red Crescent Society and the International Committee of the Red Cross – to reach and access the areas where the IOF are positioned so that they can evacuate the wounded, offer and provide aid to those who are alive under the rubble and expedite the removal of killed Palestinians to prevent the spread of diseases;

- Demand that Israel immediately ceases the targeting of medical personnel, ambulances and rescue teams, and allows them to carry out their crucial work without targeting or hindrance;
- Pressure and demand Israel to immediately and unconditionally allow unimpeded access and entry of fuel into Gaza to enable the medical and humanitarian teams to carry out their work;
- Urge Israel to allow the immediate and unconditional transfer of patients from Gaza to receive healthcare treatment;
- Provide the Gaza Strip with the necessary ambulances, machines, equipment and medical supplies to cope with the massive influx of casualties;
- Impose sanctions and implement a mandatory and comprehensive arms embargo nationally or multilaterally against Israel;
- Take effective measures to ensure accountability for Israel's war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the unfolding genocide, including by fulfilling their legal obligation under Article 146 of the Fourth Geneva Convention to prosecute those responsible for grave breaches of the Convention; and calling on the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to expedite the investigation into the Situation in Palestine with full resources and onsite visits; and
- Address the root causes underpinning Israel's successive military offensives on the Gaza Strip, as acts of violence employed to maintain and entrench the settler colonial apartheid regime

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1. 1949 First Geneva Convention (GC I) Art. 12; 1949 Second Geneva Convention (GC II), Art. 12; 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention (GC IV), Art. 16; 1977 First Additional Protocol (AP I), Art. 10; 1977 Second Additional Protocol (AP II), Art. 7.

2. Rome Statute, Article 8(2)(a)(I) & Article 8(2)(a)(II).

3. *See*, ICRC, “Respecting and protecting healthcare in armed conflicts and in situations not covered by international humanitarian law- Factsheet”, 21 May 2021, available at: [respecting-and-protecting-health-care-armed-conflicts-and-situations-not-covered](#)