



MEDICAL AID FOR PALESTINIANS

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Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon
Minister of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and
Development Affairs
King Charles St
London SW1A 2AH

15 March 2021

Dear Lord Ahmad,

Re: Helping promote essential accountability for violations of Palestinians' right to health at the 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

I am writing to urge the UK government to seize the vital opportunity of the current 46th UN Human Rights Council (HRC) session to uphold Palestinians' right to health and to help protect Palestinian health workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Israel's conduct as an occupying power has been characterised by repeated attacks on Palestinian healthcare facilities and workers, carried out with blanket impunity. In 2020, Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights and the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights documented Israel's systematic failure to conduct genuine criminal investigations into the killing of health workers and damage to and destruction of hospitals in its 2014 military offensive on Gaza. At least three health workers were killed and more than 800 injured at the 2018-2019 'Great March of Return' protests in Gaza. Yet, as the UN Commission of Inquiry has found:

*"To date, the Government of Israel has consistently failed to meaningfully investigate and prosecute commanders and soldiers for crimes and violations committed against Palestinians or to provide reparation to victims in accordance with international norms."*¹

Furthermore, Israel's suffocating 14-year blockade and closure of Gaza, considered by the International Committee of the Red Cross to constitute "*collective punishment imposed in clear violation of Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law*"², has left Gaza's population impoverished and aid dependent and its healthcare system on the brink of collapse. In 2018, UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, Prof Michael Lynk, concluded that Israel's conduct has been "*in profound breach of the right to health with respect to the Occupied Palestinian Territory*"³.

The legacy of these policies and practices has left the occupied Palestinian territory woefully unprepared to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, lacking the necessary material, financial and human resources to adequately cope with the fallout.⁴ Moreover, Israel's violations against Palestinian health providers have persisted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with at least 56 instances recorded by the World Health Organisation in 2020, including attacks against ambulances

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=24226&LangID=E>

² <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/update/palestine-update-140610.htm>

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22854&LangID=E>

⁴ <https://www.map.org.uk/downloads/5336ahrc46ngosuben.docx>

and paramedics and armed raids of healthcare facilities.⁵ While people around the world have been encouraged to 'stay home' to help prevent the spread of the virus, the rate of Israel's demolitions of Palestinian homes and other structures reached a four-year high last year. At the same time, poverty, aid dependency and food insecurity are all rising, with our partners in Gaza reporting a growing childhood malnutrition crisis.

Now, with coronavirus cases once again surging in the West Bank and intensive care units close to capacity, Israel is failing to meet its international legal duty to ensure Palestinians have rapid, comprehensive and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccinations. More than half of all Israelis – including those living in illegal settlements in the West Bank – have now received a vaccination, compared to only a few thousand Palestinians under Israel's effective control in the West Bank and Gaza. As the UK government has recognised:

*"Under International Humanitarian Law, Israel, as the occupying power, has the duty of ensuring and maintaining public health and hygiene in the OPTs to the fullest extent of the means available and with the cooperation of the local authorities."*⁶

More than 17,000 people have joined our petition to Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, urging him to urgently press Israel to uphold its duty to ensure access to COVID-19 vaccines for the Palestinian people.⁷ Upcoming resolutions at the HRC present an important opportunity to do so.

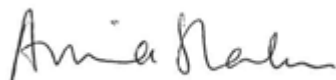
The dire health and humanitarian context in the occupied Palestinian territory is indisputably fuelled by the near-total impunity Israel enjoys while violating its duties under international humanitarian and human rights law. Of the 551 recommendations made by the UN Secretary General, UN bodies and special procedures from 2009 to 2017, Israel has "fully implemented" just 0.4%.⁸

I therefore urge you to take the opportunity of the current 46th HRC session to help address this dire situation by voting in favour of all relevant resolutions on accountability and human rights in the oPt, and to encourage fellow Member States to do the same. Doing so would be entirely consistent with the UK's stated support for the rule of international law in this context, particularly in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Conversely, a failure to support these resolutions would signal the UK's indifference to the spiralling humanitarian situation and deepening health inequalities in the oPt. It would expose a double standard that would be damaging to the UK's legitimacy as the penholder on the protection of civilians in armed conflict at the UN Security Council and champion of UNSC Resolution 2286.

I appreciate your urgent consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Aimee Shalan
Chief Executive Officer
Medical Aid for Palestinians

⁵ <https://www.map.org.uk/downloads/5347ahrc46ngosubn.docx>

⁶ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-14/128880>

⁷ <https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1201-17000-people-demand-uk-action-to-ensure-equitable-vaccines-access-for-palestinians>

⁸ <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/35/19>