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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[27 May 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Gaza's Healthcare System Is on The Brink of Collapse

Over a decade of blockade's impact on Gaza:

After a decade of suffocating closure, Gaza is suffering its worst humanitarian crisis since Israel's devastating 2014 offensive. Chronic electricity shortages have forced hospitals to rely on backup generators for most of the day, fuel for which is rapidly running out in Gaza. The UN has warned that Gaza is on the "verge of disaster". In February, 19 healthcare centres, including three hospitals, were forced to stop services in Gaza as they did not have enough fuel to keep generators running. Despite temporary funding being found for emergency fuel for the Ministry of Health hospital, no long-term solution has been reached. 40% of essential drugs have completely run out in Gaza, and patients needing medical treatment such as radiotherapy or surgery in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, or abroad are routinely prevented from exiting Gaza by Israeli authorities. Last year, only 54.5% of all permits to exit Gaza were approved by Israel in time for patients to get to care. This is the lowest rate of permit approvals ever recorded, and far below the 92% rate of approvals recorded in 2012¹. Israel's military blockade of Gaza is exacerbating Gaza's current healthcare crisis as enough medical supplies cannot reach those who most need it².

Recent Israeli airstrikes on Gaza:

From May 10th until May 21st, Israeli airstrikes devastated the besieged Gaza strip. Following the ceasefire last week, a high volume of civilian casualties and injuries were recorded, especially high numbers of women and children being targeted by Israeli airstrikes. Israeli airstrikes killed over 248+ Palestinians, including over 65+ children, and leaving thousands of Palestinians severely injured. Israel targeted Palestinian hospitals, healthcare facilities, and water desalination plants. In total six Palestinian hospitals in Gaza were damaged, as well as nine primary healthcare centres, and a desalination plant that supplies clean water to over 250,000 Palestinians. It is reported that over half of the water network in Gaza was severely damaged by Israel's most recent airstrikes³.

Inadequate COVID-19 resources available in Gaza:

The past ten days of Israeli airstrikes have entirely destroyed Gaza's main COVID-19 laboratory, which contained the only COVID-19 testing centre in Gaza and the strip's Palestinian Ministry of Health offices⁴. Israeli airstrikes also killed some of Gaza's most prominent medical professionals, who are heavily depended on due to Gaza's lack of medical professionals. Dr Ayman Abu Alouf who was leading the COVID-19 Team at Gaza's Al Shifa Hospital, was killed, alongside 12 members of his family, as well as Dr Moeen Al-Aloul who was one of Gaza's few Neurologists. Over 75,000 Palestinians are now internally displaced in Gaza, seeking shelter in overcrowded buildings, where social-distancing and wearing masks is impossible. Gaza, which is home to over two million people, is also one of the most densely populated territories on earth, making social distancing hard even in peacetime. Prior to military escalations, Gaza was already reporting a daily surge in COVID-19 cases, with over 1,000 new cases being reported everyday. All of this contributes to the prediction that the next crisis Gaza faces, will be a COVID-19 crisis. Gaza has only received 120,000 doses of vaccine (enough to only vaccinate 60,000 people)⁵.

¹ Medical Aid for Palestinians - Gaza's Health System is Close to Collapse - MAY 2021
<https://www.map.org.uk/campaigns/emergency-actionagazas-health-system-is-close-to-collapse>.

² UNRWA - Health in Gaza Strip - MAY 2021 <https://www.unrwa.org/activity/health-gaza-strip>.

³ BMJ - Israeli airstrikes kill doctors and damage healthcare facilities - MAY 2021
<https://www.bmj.com/content/373/bmj.n1300>.

⁴ The Independent - After 11 days of war, Gaza's next crisis could be the coronavirus - MAY 2021
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/gaza-israel-coronavirus-crisis-doctors-b1852840.html>.

⁵ BMJ - Israeli airstrikes kill doctors and damage healthcare facilities - MAY 2021
<https://www.bmj.com/content/373/bmj.n1300>.

Mental Health Crisis on Gaza's Children:

Palestinian children in Gaza are tragically enduring a mental health crisis, with Palestinian children who are 12 already having experienced four traumatising military bombardments with Israel, as well as over a decade of siege. The number of suicides committed by Palestinian children and teens is on the rise, with 1 in 3 children in Gaza ⁶ requiring support for conflict-related trauma. Of the 65+ children killed by recent Israeli airstrikes, 8 of whom were receiving mental health support for conflict-related trauma.

Conclusion:

PRC is deeply concerned about the healthcare catastrophe that is currently unravelling in Gaza. PRC calls on the members of the Human Rights Council to ensure Palestinians in Gaza who require healthcare and medical assistance, are treated immediately and with dignity. PRC highlights Article 25 of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services." If serious measures are not taken to ensure the health and wellbeing of Palestinians in Gaza, a preventable full-scale healthcare catastrophe claiming the lives of countless Palestinians could be foreseen.

⁶ UNICEF - Children bear brunt of violence in Gaza - MAY 2021
<https://www.unicef.org/stories/children-bear-brunt-violence-gaza>.