

# *Gaza's doctors refuse to abandon patients as Israel bombs hospitals*

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Gaza City, October 27 (RHC)-- Doctors in northern Gaza are sounding the alarm about a humanitarian "catastrophe" as Israel continues its ferocious bombardment of the besieged Palestinian coastal territory for a third week, media reports say.

As Israel prepares for its planned ground invasion of Gaza, it has warned residents in the north to flee south to avoid being targeted. That includes hospitals. But health officials at Gaza's biggest hospitals have insisted the evacuation of the wounded and displaced would be impossible.

In Gaza's biggest hospital, al-Shifa, doctors are faced with a massive influx of casualties, added to the thousands of displaced civilians taking shelter there. Bassel Amr, a volunteer ICU physician, said that the number of the wounded brought in all at once is bigger than the hospital's capacity. "We have 17 operation rooms that are prepared at the same time during massacres and ready to be used. But that is not enough. Most of the wounded need operations," he was quoted by the Middle East Eye as saying.

"But we only have the capacity to deal with 17 people at a time, while the rest wait for their turn, and some die in front of your eyes and you cannot help them because the operation rooms are full," he added. "The wounded keep dying in front of your eyes but there's nothing we can do."

The most traumatizing situation faced by doctors is the fact that they have to prioritize some cases over others. "We are left in a situation where we have to make the difficult decision to risk the life of one patient in order to save the life of another," Amr noted

Amr also pointed out that the hospital has no space for post-operative care, and many patients have to sleep in the intensive care units, which he says hinders the work of doctors. This forces doctors to treat patients on the floor. "The hospital won't be able to deal with any other crisis in the coming days as its equipment and necessary tools are already running out," he warned.

As almost 1.4 million people in Gaza are now internally displaced, thousands have taken shelter in hospitals. Al-Shifa Hospital alone is now home to 62,000 displaced people and viruses are spreading rapidly. This compounds the lack of sterilization in the hospital for patients, which makes them vulnerable to infections.

Amr added that the type of wounds received by his hospital, mainly scarring and disfigurements, indicates another health crisis after the end of hostilities. "Many of the wounded will live but will have to be on medication for a long time to manage the pain, which may lead to addiction. Others will live with disabilities."

In addition, international organizations have warned about the spread of water-borne diseases and scabies because of a lack of clean water in the besieged territory.

Meanwhile, at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in central Gaza, the obstetrics department has been converted from delivery rooms and clinics into operating rooms for treating the wounded.

One doctor working in the obstetrics and neonatology department said that the hospital staff is operating "in a state of panic, fear and shock" as Israel has warned them to flee and already bombed a building adjacent to the hospital. "One night, I was working in my department caring for sick newborns when the Israeli occupation shelled a house next to the hospital. My colleagues and I tried to secure the children," the doctor said.

Many Gaza hospitals remain out of service. On Wednesday, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that at least 12 out of the 35 hospitals in Gaza are now out of service because of damage from Israeli bombardment.

OCHA added that 46 out of 72 healthcare clinics have also shut down, leaving thousands of people without any form of medical aid. The remaining clinics and hospitals are running on generators and have few resources to treat patients who have been critically wounded or are in intensive care.

Since Israel cut off all electricity, fuel and water to Gaza on 9 October, hospitals have been overwhelmed, with a lack of life-saving resources and a high volume of critically wounded patients.

Patients who have been wounded in air strikes, pregnant women, children and people with kidney failure are some of the worst affected. The hospitals that are still working are running on generators, which health officials say won't last long.

They say this will lead to the instant death of thousands of people, including newborn babies in incubators, wounded people in intensive care units, and kidney dialysis. This comes as doctors and health officials have been warning for days that fuel is set to run out completely before this weekend.

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