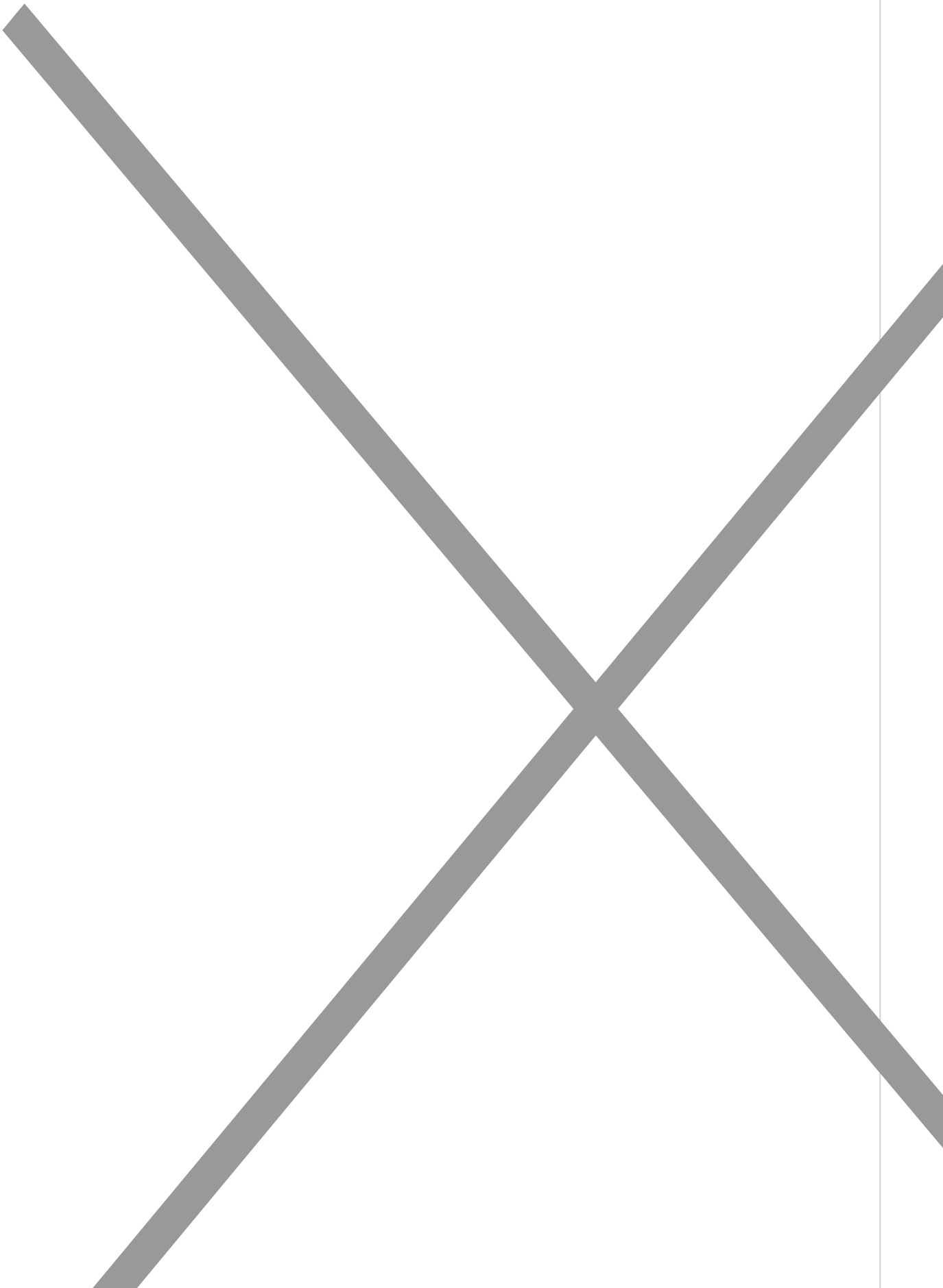


*My Father Is a Doctor in Gaza.
Israel's War on Hospitals Has
Been Agonizing.*

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Ghada Eyad's father, a pediatrician at Al-Aqsa Hospital in Gaza, examines a 19-month-old infant suffering from respiratory distress.

By Ghada Abu Muaileq / Truthout

The fragile Gaza ceasefire, which served as a lifeline for Gaza's health care sector, lasted less than two months before it collapsed under a barrage of Israeli airstrikes. In March, Israel resumed its war on hospitals, with its first strikes targeting the intensive care unit (ICU) at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, followed by the bombing of the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital, the only facility in Gaza dedicated to treating cancer patients.

Soon after, following Israeli "evacuation" orders, Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir el-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip, was once again turned into a shelter for displaced Palestinians. Doctors returned to an even harsher reality: hospitals without resources and patients without treatment. My father, a pediatrician working at Al-Aqsa Hospital, tells us how the situation worsened after the ceasefire collapsed. The hospital, which had barely recovered from a horrific Israeli bombing in October, is now in its worst condition yet. The pediatric department now lacks the necessary intensive care units to treat critically ill children and is in urgent need of essential medical equipment, including incubators for premature babies, oxygen stations and CT scanners. Under the ceasefire agreement, Israel was supposed to allow these supplies to enter, yet it failed to comply — only a limited quantity of basic medications was permitted through. Due to these severe shortages, doctors are left with no choice but to issue medical referrals, hoping that critically ill children can travel abroad in time to receive the life-saving treatment they desperately need.

One of the most heartbreaking cases my father told me about was that of 2-year-old Lana, her parents' only child. Lana's suffering began months ago when she started experiencing frequent seizures. My father and the pediatric medical team tried treating her with the available anti-convulsant medications, but she did not respond. He conducted numerous tests, yet the results showed no clear diagnosis. This led him to suspect an underlying condition and inform the medical team that she urgently needed advanced genetic MRI scans for an accurate diagnosis. However, this type of MRI technology is unavailable in Gaza due to Israel's blockade, which has restricted medical equipment even before the war.

Given Lana's worsening condition, my father issued a medical referral for her to travel abroad for treatment. However, due to Israel's delays in patient travel approvals and its strict limitations on medical evacuations, Lana endured an additional two months of suffering before finally being granted permission to travel to Egypt — on the condition that only one guardian could accompany her. Her mother traveled with her. Tragically, due to the prolonged delays and deliberate obstruction, Lana's fragile heart could not endure any longer. She passed away just one day after arriving in Egypt. She could have been saved if she had been allowed to travel earlier.

Now, with the ceasefire broken, the border crossing has been completely shut down, preventing all medical evacuations. Thousands of children suffering from heart disease, kidney failure and cancer are in urgent need of life-saving treatment abroad. But they cannot receive it because of their "crime" of being born into a city under siege.

These scenes are not new; they are a repetition of 18 months of genocide. Doctors have found themselves in the most difficult situations, testing their mental endurance and human compassion.

My father, who feels the pain of the children, hears their cries and sees them clinging to his white coat, hoping he can relieve their suffering. However, doctors are placed in an agonizing position. My father

says, “We have hundreds of injured children, but we have only a few antibiotics and painkillers, and they are not enough to save everyone.” As a result, many critical cases are condemned to slow death.

On August 26, the Israeli military issued orders to “evacuate” the residential area where Al-Aqsa Hospital is located, following a series of Israeli attacks on tents housing displaced persons in the hospital’s yard. The military continued to threaten the hospital with closure, and the tension gripped everyone present. My father and the medical staff worked to calm the patients and the displaced people after the chaos that had spread through the hospital. They struggled to evacuate patients under extreme difficulty, with some being taken out of ICUs and emergency rooms. The electricity was cut off, leading to the death of several premature newborns who were relying on ventilators. It was a harrowing day for all of us, especially as a family, because my father was at the hospital for long hours due to the heavy workload on doctors during the war. The wartime collapse of communication networks made it impossible to reach him or know if he was safe.

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The Israeli military did not stop at what it had already done to Gaza’s hospitals — destroying, raiding and brutalizing medical staff at al-Ahli Arab Hospital, al-Shifa Hospital, and 23 other medical centers. Now, the Israeli military is intent on repeating its crimes against Al-Aqsa Hospital — the last remaining functional hospital in central Gaza Strip, which provides vital health care to nearly 1 million Palestinians.

Although targeting hospitals is an unequivocal war crime, the international community complicitly looks away as Israel systematically destroys them.

The question remains: How long will patients and doctors remain targets for Israel’s war machine?

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