

UN Human Rights Office in Occupied Palestinian Territory

Ramallah

25 June 2024

Statement on the killing and arbitrary detention of health workers in Gaza

The UN Human Rights Office decries the reported killing of 500 health workers in Gaza since 7 October 2023. These killings have occurred against the backdrop of systematic attacks on hospitals and other medical facilities in violation of the laws of war.

As the occupying power in Gaza, Israel must fulfill its obligations under international humanitarian law to maintain medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene, and protect and respect the wounded and the sick, the infirm, expectant mothers, and children. It must also uphold its fundamental obligations under international human rights law in the occupied territory, including in relation to the right to health.

The latest health worker reportedly killed was Mr. Hani Al Ja'afarwi, head of Emergency and Ambulance Services at a health clinic in Gaza City, on 23 June 2024. Many health workers have also died with their family members when residential buildings were struck by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

Health workers have been subjected to other serious violations under international humanitarian and human rights law during this period. Our Office has gathered credible information that IDF raids on hospitals have often led to mass detention and enforced disappearances, including of medical staff. For instance, at Al Awda and Kamal Adwan Hospitals in North Gaza, Al Shifa Medical Complex in Gaza City, and Al Amal Hospitals in Khan Younis, the IDF detained health personnel, including hospital directors. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, the number of health workers detained by IDF since 7 October stands at 310. Some released health workers have alleged they were subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment in Israeli custody. Two Palestinian doctors, Dr. Adnan Al Bursh of Al Shifa Medical Complex and Dr. Iyad Al Rantisi of Kamal Adwan Hospital, reportedly died in IDF detention in Gaza as a result of torture and ill-treatment.

The killing, detention and enforced disappearance of health workers in Gaza, in parallel with the systematic attacks and destruction of hospitals and other medical facilities, has had a devastating impact on the people. The collapse of the healthcare system has further added to the unconscionable level of death and suffering of civilians in Gaza. The collapse has occurred when communicable diseases are spreading fast, with particularly dire consequences for children, older people, pregnant women, and people with disabilities.

Under international humanitarian law, hospitals, medical personnel and ambulances must be respected and protected at all times. Hospitals can only lose their protection if they are used to commit acts harmful to the enemy and fall within the definition of military objective and, even then, can only be attacked if a warning to cease the hostile use has been given and has not been followed. Equally, medical personnel only lose their protection if they are taking a direct part in hostilities. Intentionally directing attacks against medical personnel and hospitals that have not lost their protection are war crimes.

The UN Human Rights Office implores Israel to immediately cease the killing of protected people, including healthcare workers, and calls for an immediate and impartial investigation into these killings and accountability for the perpetrators. We further urge the immediate release of all arbitrarily detained health workers and for Israel to uphold the absolute prohibition of torture.

ENDS

For more information and media requests, please contact ohchr-opt@un.org

Tag and share:

Twitter [@OHCHR_Palestine](https://twitter.com/OHCHR_Palestine)

Facebook [UN Human Rights Palestine](https://www.facebook.com/UNHumanRightsPalestine)