

June 17, 2024

Urgent Call to Action for the Protection and Relief of Gaza's Children

We, medical and health organizations, associations, and workers, are deeply alarmed by the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe facing children in Gaza, exacerbated by relentless bombardments and systemic blockades imposed by Israel. This crisis demands immediate and decisive action from the international community to prevent further loss of life and to address the dire and immediate needs of Gaza's most vulnerable population- the children.

Even before the current conflict, children in Gaza were living under extremely harsh conditions due to the 16-year blockade and frequent cycles of violence. The systemic deprivation and persistent violence have severely eroded their physical and mental well-being, as they have been continuously exposed to trauma and insecurity.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Gaza last October, more than 100,000 people have been killed, injured, or are missing—equating to a staggering 5% of Gaza's population. This war is having a particularly devastating impact on children. According to the latest figures from the Palestinian Ministry of Health, over 7770 children have been killed and thousands more have been injured. Approximately 1.7 million residents, half of them children, have been displaced internally and are struggling with inadequate access to essentials like water, food, fuel, and medicine.

Malnutrition

At least 346,000 children under the age of five are at great risk of malnutrition as the already untenable situation rapidly deteriorates. The situation is particularly severe in northern Gaza, where 16% of children under two are experiencing acute malnutrition, and nearly 3% suffer from severe wasting, the most dangerous form of malnutrition.

Health and Medical Challenges

Hospitals are struggling to function, and many injured children are not receiving the critical care they need. Diseases such as diarrhea, respiratory infections, and skin diseases are rampant due to the destruction of water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure. Over 1,000 children have had one or more limbs amputated due to injuries sustained in the conflict. The mental health impact is also profound, with an estimated one million children in Gaza now requiring mental health and psychosocial support.

Currently severely injured patients requiring urgent medical attention not available in Gaza are being refused permission to leave the strip for hospitalization in Egypt, Israel or wherever they can receive the care they need.

Displacement and Separation

According to recent estimates, at least 17,000 children in the Gaza Strip are unaccompanied or separated from their families. This figure represents 1% of the overall displaced population of 1.7

million people. These children are experiencing significant trauma and loss, having often lost one or both parents due to the conflict. Currently, the situation for children in Rafah, the southern part of Gaza previously designated as a safe zone by Israel, is extremely dire. With approximately 600,000 children seeking refuge in Rafah, the area has become among the most densely populated and perilous zones in Gaza. The recent intensification of Israeli military operations has forced hundreds of thousands of families to flee again.

Our Demands:

1. An immediate and sustained ceasefire
2. Ensure the protection of all medical facilities and personnel from attacks and bombardments.
3. Injured children should be evacuated to specialized paediatric facilities in Israel, Egypt, and other centers in the Middle East and Europe, with parents or caregivers allowed to accompany them. They must be ensured their unconditional and safe return to Gaza after the war or the completion of their treatment.
4. The immediate release of all hostages.
5. Ensure the immediate and continuous supply of adequate amounts of aid, preferably by land crossings, such as Kerem Shalom and Erez.
6. Create facilities that provide comprehensive pediatric physical medicine and rehabilitative care, including prosthetics in Gaza.
7. Provide acute trauma-informed mental health services for children and prepare for ongoing psychological care.
8. Plan for the reconstruction of schools, clinics, hospitals, and other child-focused facilities to restore a sense of normalcy and support for Gaza's children.