

Gaza Under Siege: Israel Destroys Hospitals, Denies Entry to Doctors and Medical Aid

Interviewee Dr Swee Ang, co-Founder and Patron of British Charity Medical Aid for Palestinians

By [Dr Ang Swee Chai](#)

Global Research, August 26, 2014

[Al-Mayadeen](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Interview with Dr. Swee Ang Chai

Why was the [Lancet letter](#) which has 24 signatories of doctors and scientists published?

Dr. Swee Ang Chai: All the authors and signatories fear the worse at the beginning of this crisis which erupted in early July based on their previous experience. However the situation has got much worse since the publication of the letter. Gaza has already been declared a disaster area by the UK government. Despite the destruction of infrastructure, doctors and healthcare workers in Gaza continued to work despite severe conditions and their personal circumstances. Their own homes are being destroyed and families killed, and to be landed with more than 12,000 wounded is simply overwhelming for any medical system. That this is why Swee and her surgical colleagues wanted to assist by volunteering to go to Gaza.. As of yesterday (22 August 2014) the death toll reached 2083, with 50% women and children. Eighty five families were annihilated, and 12,656 injured. Forty five clinics and fifteen hospital were destroyed (two of the hospitals completely flattened), 8 fire stations, 1 ambulance station. Health institutions should be protected as sanctuaries under international law for the wounded and sick people, but they were targeted.

You and your consultant surgical colleague have just been deported as you entered Israel to get to Gaza...elaborate.

They first gave me a three month Israeli visa of the B2 type when they thought I was a tourist. Then when they realized I was going to Gaza, my colleague and I were taken aside and interrogated in a very humiliating way for three hours, following that we were detained, and deported after around 16-17 hours. But the personal humiliation, detention and deportation is not the worst part. It is the realisation that this is part of the siege imposed on Gaza. The siege does not only apply to medical equipment and supplies for Gaza but also to people who want to get to Gaza to assist. They can stop me from getting to Gaza but they cannot stop me from caring for and supporting the Palestinians, and they cannot stop the world from knowing about what they do to Palestinians. These crimes committed against Palestinians cannot be covered up. I will raise my voice and say what happened in Gaza. Gaza was shelled with tons of ammunition and depleted uranium which not only kill immediately but leave residues which emit radioactive rays causing malformations in utero and miscarriages. And this will continue despite repeated ceasefires. Gazans want to rebuild their broken homes but building materials are blockaded.

People have no choice but to rebuild their broken homes with rubble contaminated with radioactive uranium as the siege continues. What do you want them to do? They have no choice but to rebuild their homes over mounds of destruction and 'nuclear' waste. Even if the war stops, these rays will have an impact on people's lives.

Is Britain and the USA complicit in this?

I will not say that all of Britain and the US are complicit. Some in high positions are. But I can tell you that within a week of having published the Lancet letter, we got 20,000 signatures endorsing the letter. But there are others who are protesting against the letter at the same time. And there are people who have been subjected to threats via email saying that if you continue to support Palestinians you will be killed. But we must say what we have to say, this is the truth. This is what is happening, massacres, and if we are silent in the face of massacres we would not be fit to be doctors and scientists. We have to be witnesses. 32 years ago, I was a doctor supporting Israel, and my family and I used to support Israel. But when Israel invaded and occupied Lebanon in 1982, and bombed Lebanon for ten weeks, I could not tolerate it anymore. I decided not to support Israel and volunteered to help the wounded in Lebanon. Later I went to Gaza. My life changed, when I went to Lebanon, I went to Sabra and Shatilla, and I did not find terrorists. I found a people who are patient, gentle and generous and they welcomed me, amidst their enormous suffering. But they were labeled as terrorists. After the evacuation of the PLO, when they were defenceless, they were massacred. I went back after the attack (1982), and I found that some of the patients I treated were killed. I went back to London, and continued with my work and it is impossible to say nothing. For 32 years, I decided not to be silent, and will speak up for Palestinians as a witness to what happened to them. I am also a friend of the Palestinians. So wherever I go I will talk about what happened to Palestinians and the injustice which they have been enduring, and I will do this until I die.

Interviewer: You have written a book: From Beirut to Jerusalem, but since that time, there has been no change for the Palestinians. You were very angry. Let me read a section of the Gaza letter (published by Lancet):

"We register with dismay that only 5% of our Israeli academic colleagues signed an appeal to their government to stop the military operation against Gaza. We are tempted to conclude that with the exception of this 5%, the rest of the Israeli academics are complicit in the massacre and destruction of Gaza. We also see the complicity of our countries in Europe and North America in this massacre and the impotence once again of the international institutions and organisations to stop this massacre" the letter is directed to Who?

Dr. Swee Ang Chai: This paragraph refers to all people who are guilty of knowing that the massacre is going on and yet say nothing. They are complicit in the crime. There are also the people who deliberately cover it up. It is our duty and that of Mayadeen to inform the world of what is happening. But when we speak up, many attacked us because they were complicit in this crime, and tried to cover up what is happening by intimidating and silencing us. For example deporting doctors so that we do not see and witness what is happening. But they forget that the Palestinian doctors are still there, and they can tell the world what is going on because they are there. For the rest of the world, some do not take a stand because of lack of knowledge and it is our role to inform them. Others are worried about speaking up through fear, but we must support them to take a stand.

What do you think of Israel's attack on people, children etc., why do you think they are killing them?

I am very sad because only 10% of Israel want the massacre to stop and the rest want it to continue. In other words the other 90% of Israelis want Palestinians chucked out or killed, and this is compatible with ethnic cleansing and mass extermination, a strong word, but what is happening in Gaza is an attempted or incremental genocide..

Why do you decide to publish the letter in the Lancet?

As you know this is a strong letter. many editors have difficulty with it. But we know the Lancet is a prestigious journal, and Richard Horton took the risk in publishing this. He knows Palestine well, since several years. His conscience made him publish this letter. He is paying a high price for publishing the letter. There is a nasty campaign to get him fired.

Thank you Dr. Swee Ang Chai, founder of Medical Aid for Palestinians and for your voice as a medical doctor and humanitarian.

An open letter for the people in Gaza

[Lancet letter](#)

by Paola Manduca, Iain Chalmers, Derek Summerfield, Mads Gilbert, Swee Ange, on behalf of 24 signatories

We are doctors and scientists, who spend our lives developing means to care and protect health and lives. We are also informed people; we teach the ethics of our professions, together with the knowledge and practice of it. We all have worked in and known the situation of Gaza for years.

On the basis of our ethics and practice, we are denouncing what we witness in the aggression of Gaza by Israel.

We ask our colleagues, old and young professionals, to denounce this Israeli aggression. We challenge the perversity of a propaganda that justifies the creation of an emergency to masquerade a massacre, a so-called "defensive aggression". In reality it is a ruthless assault of unlimited duration, extent, and intensity. We wish to report the facts as we see them and their implications on the lives of the people.

We are appalled by the military onslaught on civilians in Gaza under the guise of punishing terrorists. This is the third large scale military assault on Gaza since 2008. Each time the death toll is borne mainly by innocent people in Gaza, especially women and children under the unacceptable pretext of Israel eradicating political parties and resistance to the occupation and siege they impose.

This action also terrifies those who are not directly hit, and wounds the soul, mind, and resilience of the young generation. Our condemnation and disgust are further compounded by the denial and prohibition for Gaza to receive external help and supplies to alleviate the dire circumstances.

The blockade on Gaza has tightened further since last year and this has worsened the toll on Gaza's population. In Gaza, people suffer from hunger, thirst, pollution, shortage of medicines, electricity, and any means to get an income, not only by being bombed and shelled. Power crisis, gasoline

shortage, water and food scarcity, sewage outflow and ever decreasing resources are disasters caused directly and indirectly by the siege.¹

People in Gaza are resisting this aggression because they want a better and normal life and, even while crying in sorrow, pain, and terror, they reject a temporary truce that does not provide a real chance for a better future. A voice under the attacks in Gaza is that of Um Al Ramlawi who speaks for all in Gaza: “They are killing us all anyway—either a slow death by the siege, or a fast one by military attacks. We have nothing left to lose—we must fight for our rights, or die trying.”²

Gaza has been blockaded by sea and land since 2006. Any individual of Gaza, including fishermen venturing beyond 3 nautical miles of the coast of Gaza, face being shot by the Israeli Navy. No one from Gaza can leave from the only two checkpoints, Erez or Rafah, without special permission from the Israelis and the Egyptians, which is hard to come by for many, if not impossible. People in Gaza are unable to go abroad to study, work, visit families, or do business. Wounded and sick people cannot leave easily to get specialised treatment outside Gaza. Entries of food and medicines into Gaza have been restricted and many essential items for survival are prohibited.³ Before the present assault, medical stock items in Gaza were already at an all time low because of the blockade.³ They have run out now. Likewise, Gaza is unable to export its produce. Agriculture has been severely impaired by the imposition of a buffer zone, and agricultural products cannot be exported due to the blockade. 80% of Gaza’s population is dependent on food rations from the UN.

Much of Gaza’s buildings and infrastructure had been destroyed during Operation Cast Lead, 2008–09, and building materials have been blockaded so that schools, homes, and institutions cannot be properly rebuilt. Factories destroyed by bombardment have rarely been rebuilt adding unemployment to destitution.

Despite the difficult conditions, the people of Gaza and their political leaders have recently moved to resolve their conflicts “without arms and harm” through the process of reconciliation between factions, their leadership renouncing titles and positions, so that a unity government can be formed abolishing the divisive factional politics operating since 2007. This reconciliation, although accepted by many in the international community, was rejected by Israel. The present Israeli attacks stop this chance of political unity between Gaza and the West Bank and single out a part of the Palestinian society by destroying the lives of people of Gaza. Under the pretext of eliminating terrorism, Israel is trying to destroy the growing Palestinian unity. Among other lies, it is stated that civilians in Gaza are hostages of Hamas whereas the truth is that the Gaza Strip is sealed by the Israelis and Egyptians.

Gaza has been bombed continuously for the past 14 days followed now by invasion on land by tanks and thousands of Israeli troops. More than 60 000 civilians from Northern Gaza were ordered to leave their homes. These internally displaced people have nowhere to go since Central and Southern Gaza are also subjected to heavy artillery bombardment. The whole of Gaza is under attack. The only shelters in Gaza are the schools of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), uncertain shelters already targeted during Cast Lead, killing many.

According to Gaza Ministry of Health and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA),¹ as of July 21, 149 of the 558 killed in Gaza and 1100 of the 3504 wounded are children. Those buried under the rubble are not counted yet. As we write, the BBC reports of the bombing of another hospital, hitting the intensive care unit and operating theatres, with deaths of patients and staff. There are now fears for the main hospital Al Shifa. Moreover, most people are psychologically traumatised in Gaza. Anyone older than 6 years has already lived through their third military assault by Israel.

The massacre in Gaza spares no one, and includes the disabled and sick in hospitals, children playing on the beach or on the roof top, with a large majority of non-combatants. Hospitals, clinics, ambulances, mosques, schools, and press buildings have all been attacked, with thousands of private homes bombed, clearly directing fire to target whole families killing them within their homes, depriving families of their homes by chasing them out a few minutes before destruction. An entire area was destroyed on July 20, leaving thousands of displaced people homeless, beside wounding hundreds and killing at least 70—this is way beyond the purpose of finding tunnels. None of these are military objectives. These attacks aim to terrorise, wound the soul and the body of the people, and make their life impossible in the future, as well as also demolishing their homes and prohibiting the means to rebuild.

Weaponry known to cause long-term damages on health of the whole population are used; particularly non fragmentation weaponry and hard-head bombs.^{4, 5} We witnessed targeted weaponry used indiscriminately and on children and we constantly see that so-called intelligent weapons fail to be precise, unless they are deliberately used to destroy innocent lives.

We denounce the myth propagated by Israel that the aggression is done caring about saving civilian lives and children's wellbeing.

Israel's behaviour has insulted our humanity, intelligence, and dignity as well as our professional ethics and efforts. Even those of us who want to go and help are unable to reach Gaza due to the blockade.

This "defensive aggression" of unlimited duration, extent, and intensity must be stopped.

Additionally, should the use of gas be further confirmed, this is unequivocally a war crime for which, before anything else, high sanctions will have to be taken immediately on Israel with cessation of any trade and collaborative agreements with Europe.

As we write, other massacres and threats to the medical personnel in emergency services and denial of entry for international humanitarian convoys are reported.⁶ We as scientists and doctors cannot keep silent while this crime against humanity continues. We urge readers not to be silent too. Gaza trapped under siege, is being killed by one of the world's largest and most sophisticated modern military machines. The land is poisoned by weapon debris, with consequences for future generations. If those of us capable of speaking up fail to do so and take a stand against this war crime, we are also complicit in the destruction of the lives and homes of 1.8 million people in Gaza.

We register with dismay that only 5% of our Israeli academic colleagues signed an appeal to their government to stop the military operation against Gaza. We are tempted to conclude that with the exception of this 5%, the rest of the Israeli academics are complicit in the massacre and destruction of Gaza. We also see the complicity of our countries in Europe and North America in this massacre and the impotence once again of the international institutions and organisations to stop this massacre.

The original source of this article is [Al-Mayadeen](#)
Copyright © [Dr Ang Swee Chai](#), [Al-Mayadeen](#), 2014

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: **Dr Ang Swee Chai**

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca