

The Maiming Fields of Gaza

By [Dr. Derek A Summerfield](#), [Dr. David Halpin](#), and [Dr Ang Swee Chai](#)

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Since 30 March 2018, Palestinians civilians living as refugees and exiles in Gaza ever since they were driven out from Palestine have been gathering in mass, unarmed demonstration about their right of return to the homeland they lost in 1948. Confronted by the Israeli army, including 100 snipers, the toll of dead and wounded Palestinian civilians is mounting at a shocking rate as we write.

There is a background to this. **Firstly, there is the ongoing impact of the 12 year long Israeli blockade of Gaza** on the care and health of her people, and the degrading of its health services. The violence and destruction inflicted by Israeli military action in Operation Protective Edge in 2014 and Operation Cast Lead in 2008-9 marked a distinct turning point in the pauperization of Gaza, against a backdrop of an ever tightening blockade since 2006. That assault in 2014 killed over 2,200 civilians, a quarter of whom were children, wounded 11,000, destroyed 15 hospitals, 45 clinics and 80,000 homes.(1)

Since 2014 Israel has further tightened the passage of essential medicines and equipment into Gaza, and of the entry of doctors and experts from abroad who offer technical expertise not available locally. Gazan hospitals have been depleted of antibiotics, anaesthetic agents, painkillers, other essential drugs, disposables, and fuel to run surgical theatres. (2) Patients die while waiting for permission to go for specialist treatment outside Gaza. All elective surgery has been cancelled since last January 2018, and 3 hospitals have closed because of medication, equipment and fuel shortages (3). Medical personnel have been working on reduced salaries. Gazan health professionals find it almost impossible to get Israeli permission to travel abroad to further their training. The regular episodic military assaults on Gaza and the current targeting of unarmed demonstrators are part of a pattern of periodically induced emergencies arising from Israeli policy. The cumulative effects of the impact on healthcare provision for the general population have been documented in multiple reports by NGOs, UN agencies and the WHO. (4). This appears to be a strategy for the de-development of health and social services impinging on all the population of Gaza.

The current systematic use of excessive force towards unarmed civilians, including children and journalists, is provoking a further crisis for the people of Gaza. Since 30 March 2018, snipers firing military grade ammunition have caused crippling wounds to unarmed demonstrators.(5) As of 23 April 2018, 5511 Palestinians, including at least 454 children, have been injured by Israeli forces, including 1,739 from live ammunition according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza. As of April 27, the death toll has reached 48 and additional hundreds wounded.

Even the BBC has shown films of the deliberate shooting of people who were standing harmlessly or running away, including children and journalists (6). The sniper-fire is mostly

not to the head, with most of the wounds to the lower torso and legs. Dozens have needed emergency amputation of either one or both legs, and a further 1,300 required immediate external fixations which will entail an estimated 7,800 hours of subsequent complex reconstructive surgery if the limbs are to be saved. This is calculated maiming. More may die or incur life-long disability because of the degraded state of health service and the prohibition by Israel of the transfer for the seriously wounded (7). How is Gaza to survive this situation? And meanwhile, the many that have lost non-emergency healthcare because of the ongoing lack of medicines and energy will be joined by many more now that all scarce resources are going to life and limb saving efforts.

Whilst various UN and WHO agencies have condemned Israeli actions, Western governments have not uttered a murmur and thus bolster the impunity Israel seems always to have enjoyed in its treatment of Palestinian society. Others who seek to document and to draw attention to events like this, including in medical journals, are often subject to vilifying ad hominem attacks, as have journal editors (8). These are matters of international shame.

*

Derek Summerfield, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College, University of London.

David Halpin, Retired orthopaedic and trauma surgeon. Member - British Orthopaedic Association.

Swee Ang, Consultant Trauma and Orthopaedic Surgeon, Barts Health, London

Andrea Balduzzi, Researcher, University of Genoa, Italy

Franco Camandona, MD, OspedaliGaliera, Genoa, Italy

Gianni Tognoni, Mario Negri Institute, Milan, Italy

Ireo Bono, MD, Oncologist, Savon, Italy

Marina Rui, PhD Università di Genoa, Italy

Vittorio Agnoletto, MD, University of Milan, Former MEP, Italy

Notes

(1) 50 days of death and destruction. Institute for Middle East Understanding. <https://imeu.org/article/50-days-of-death-destruction-israels-operation-...>

(2) Emergency Delegation to the Gaza Strip. Physicians for Human Rights Israel. <http://www.phr.org.il/en/phri-emergency-delegation-to-the-gaza-strip-apr...>

(3) -<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180213-work-at-main-gaza-hospital-st...> February 13, 2018
-<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/palestinians-die-israel-refuses-me...>

(4) -Unnecessary loss of life <http://gisha.org/updates/8742>
-Humanitarian Coordinator calls for protection of Palestinian demonstrators in Gaza alongside support for urgent humanitarian needs

-<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-coordinator-calls-protectio...>

-Israel/OPT: Authorities must refrain from using excessive force in response to Palestine Land Day protests <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/03/israelopt-authorities-mus...>

5) World Health Organisation Special Situation report- Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territory. <https://israelpalestineneews.org/who-special-situation-report-gaza-occupi...>

6) The Palestinian Day of Return: from a short day of commemoration to a long day of mourning K. Elessi 27 April 2018, Lancet

[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)30940-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)30940-1)

Civilians, health workers, journalists and children killed and wounded march 30-april 27, 2018

-<http://www.msf.org/en/article/palestine-msf-teams-gaza-observe-unusually...>

-Horrific injuries reported among Gaza

protesters <https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/828-horrific-injuries-reported-...> Palestinians killed and hundreds injured in Gaza during demonstrations along the

fence <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/four-palestinians-killed-and-hundreds-in...>

-New MAP film from Gaza: health workers under attack

<https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/827-new-map-film-from-gaza-atta...>

-Adalah& Al Mezan petition Israeli Supreme Court: Order Israeli army to stop using snipers, live ammunition to disperse Gaza

protests <http://www.mezan.org/en/post/22754/Adalah+%26+Al+Mezan+petition+Israeli+...>

(7) - <https://www.ochaopt.org/theme/casualties>

-<https://mailchi.mp/phr/muwsh5pulz-991741?e=19b7f93641>

(8) Pressure on 'The Lancet' for Gaza letter another example of pro-Israel assault on freedom of expression 11 novembre 2014 |Catherine Baker pour

Mondoweiss <http://www.aurdip.fr/pressure-on-the-lancet-for-gaza.html?lang=fr>

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