

HRW calls on Israel to vaccinate all Palestinians against COVID-19



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu receives the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.
(Photo: AFP)

New York, January 19 (RHC)-- Human Rights Watch (HRW) has urged Israel to provide more than 4.5 million Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip with COVID-19 vaccines against the backdrop of reports that Tel Aviv was deliberately letting the spread of the disease in the occupied territories.

In a statement on Sunday, the U.S.-based rights group said the regime must carry out its obligations, as the "occupying power," under the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure provision of medical supplies. The need for the supply, it said, has gone up "after more than 50 years of occupation with no end in sight."

"Israeli authorities should provide COVID-19 vaccines to the more than 4.5 million Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. While Israel has already vaccinated more than 20 percent of its citizens, including Jewish settlers in the West Bank, it has not committed to vaccinate Palestinians living in the same occupied territory under its military rule."

It added that the said responsibility, as well as Israel's obligations under international human rights, includes providing vaccines in a "non-discriminatory way" to those Palestinians living under the regime's control, using as a benchmark what is provided for its own people.

The rights group particularly slammed the practice of giving shots to illegal Israeli settlers in the West Bank, but not their Palestinian neighbors. "Nothing can justify today's reality in parts of the West Bank, where people on one side of the street are receiving vaccines, while those on the other do not, based on whether they're Jewish or Palestinian," said HRW's Israel and Palestine director Omar Shakir in the statement. He also stressed that everyone in the same territory should be given the COVID-19 vaccine, "regardless of their ethnicity."

The Palestinian Authority (PA), which runs the occupied West Bank, reported over 5,810 active COVID-19 cases in the region, excluding East Jerusalem al-Quds, as of January 14. It also reported more than 100,000 cases and 1,000 deaths in these areas since the beginning of the pandemic.

Separately, the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas, which runs Gaza, reported 7,000 active COVID-19 cases in the blockaded enclave as of January 14, and a total of over 45,000 cases and 400 deaths. On December 19, Israel began its coronavirus inoculation drive, which included illegal settlers in the West Bank. So far over a million people have received the shot.

In the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel captured and annexed East Jerusalem al-Quds, in a move that has never won international recognition, along with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

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