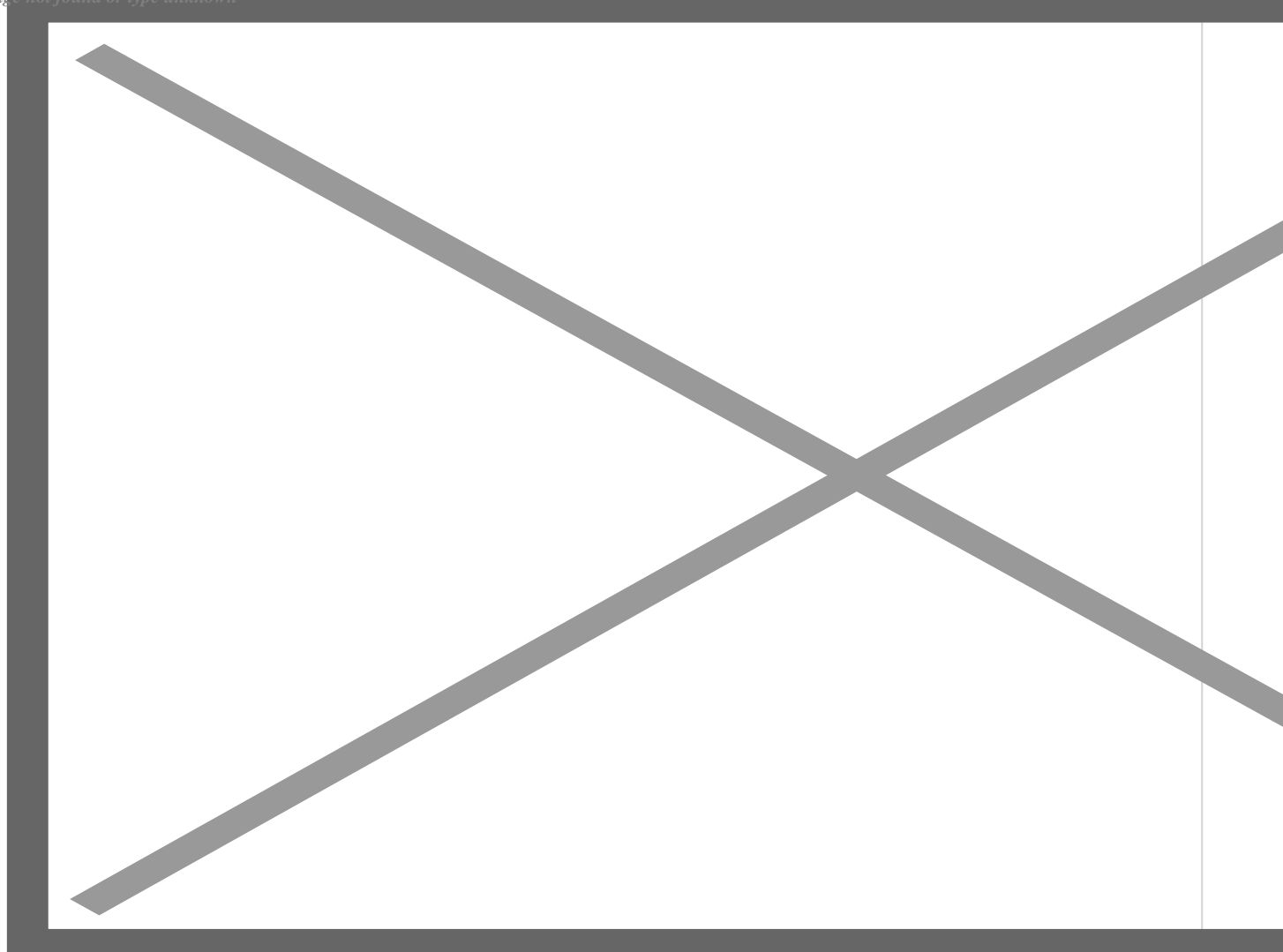


Red Cross says vicious new COVID-19 wave hits besieged Gaza

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A young Palestinian carries a lantern that he bought ahead of the fasting month of Ramadan, in the town of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. (Photo: AFP)

Gaza City, April 21 (RHC)-- The International Red Cross says Palestinian people in the besieged Gaza Strip have been coping with an alarming increase in reported COVID-19 cases amid a critical shortage of essential medicines and medical equipment.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said in a report on Tuesday that hospitals in the Palestinian enclave were struggling with insufficient ICU capacity and had been under immense pressure to admit new patients.

Almost all of Gaza has been currently declared as a red zone by the Palestinian health authorities because of widespread community transmission, it said. Gaza has faced more than 1000 new infections each day for the past couple of weeks, with positivity rates of between 30 percent and 38 percent for all tested persons.

Palestinian health workers have voiced serious concerns about the rising infections across Gaza. "The situation is scary. Every day I see people dying of COVID-19. When I am at home, I do every possible recipe that I can think of that could increase the immunity of my children. I always wonder how to protect them and how to protect myself so that they don't have to face my death," a Palestinian nurse and a mother of four said.

Local authorities in the Gaza Strip struggled for months to lower the coronavirus infection rates through strict measures. However, the Israeli blockade has compounded the struggle of health workers in the occupied city, undermining their efforts to contain and track the spread of the virus.

Hundreds of Gazan patients have already lost their lives in recent years due to the Israeli regime's inhumane practices under the watchful eye of the international community. Experts say Tel Aviv must end its illegal policies and remove any barriers that may hinder Palestinians from accessing proper medical care.

In December last year, two dozen lawmakers of the European Parliament signed a petition launched by a rights group, calling on the Israeli regime to allow immediate entry of necessary equipment and medical supplies into Gaza to assist in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Israel also stands accused of practicing 'vaccine apartheid.' The regime does not provide jabs to the Palestinians, despite calls by several international organizations to ensure coronavirus vaccine doses are provided to Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

As of Tuesday morning, Palestinian health authorities recorded 310,555 cases of the virus, including 3,319 deaths. In an attempt to curb the spread of the virus, the Hamas resistance movement has imposed new restrictions on gatherings.

The Israeli regime has been keeping Gaza under an all-out siege since 2007, after Hamas won the elections and took over the coastal enclave's affairs.

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