

*Palestinians dig mass grave as
bodies pile up inside Israeli-
encircled Gaza hospital*

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Gaza City, November 14 (RHC)-- Palestinians trapped inside Gaza's biggest hospital are digging a mass grave to bury patients who died under Israeli encirclement of hospitals in the besieged Palestinian enclave.

Israeli forces on Tuesday kept surrounding al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City, where 650 patients and 5,000-7,000 other displaced civilians are trapped inside the hospital grounds. The site has been under constant fire from Israeli snipers and drones over the past few weeks.

In recent days, at least 40 patients have died, including three premature babies whose incubators were shut down when power went out. Ashraf Al-Qidra, Gaza's health ministry spokesman said there were about 100 bodies decomposing inside and no way to get them out.

Gaza medical facilities are in desperate need of life-saving equipment as well as fuel for their electric generators. One of the hardest-hit medical facilities is Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City.

The Israeli military has been encircling it with armored vehicles for the past several days under the pretext that Palestinian fighters are present around the hospital. The Hamas resistance movement has, however, denied the Israeli claim.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) said in a report that all but one of the hospitals in the northern Gaza Strip are out of service due to the lack of power and medical supplies.

"All but one of the hospitals in Gaza City and northern Gaza are reportedly out of service, as of 13 November, due to the lack of power, medical consumables, oxygen, food and water, compounded by bombardments and fighting in their vicinities," the report reads.

According to the UNRWA, "Al Ahli Hospital, in Gaza City, which currently accommodates over 500 patients, is reportedly the sole medical facility able to receive patients, amid increasing shortages and challenges."

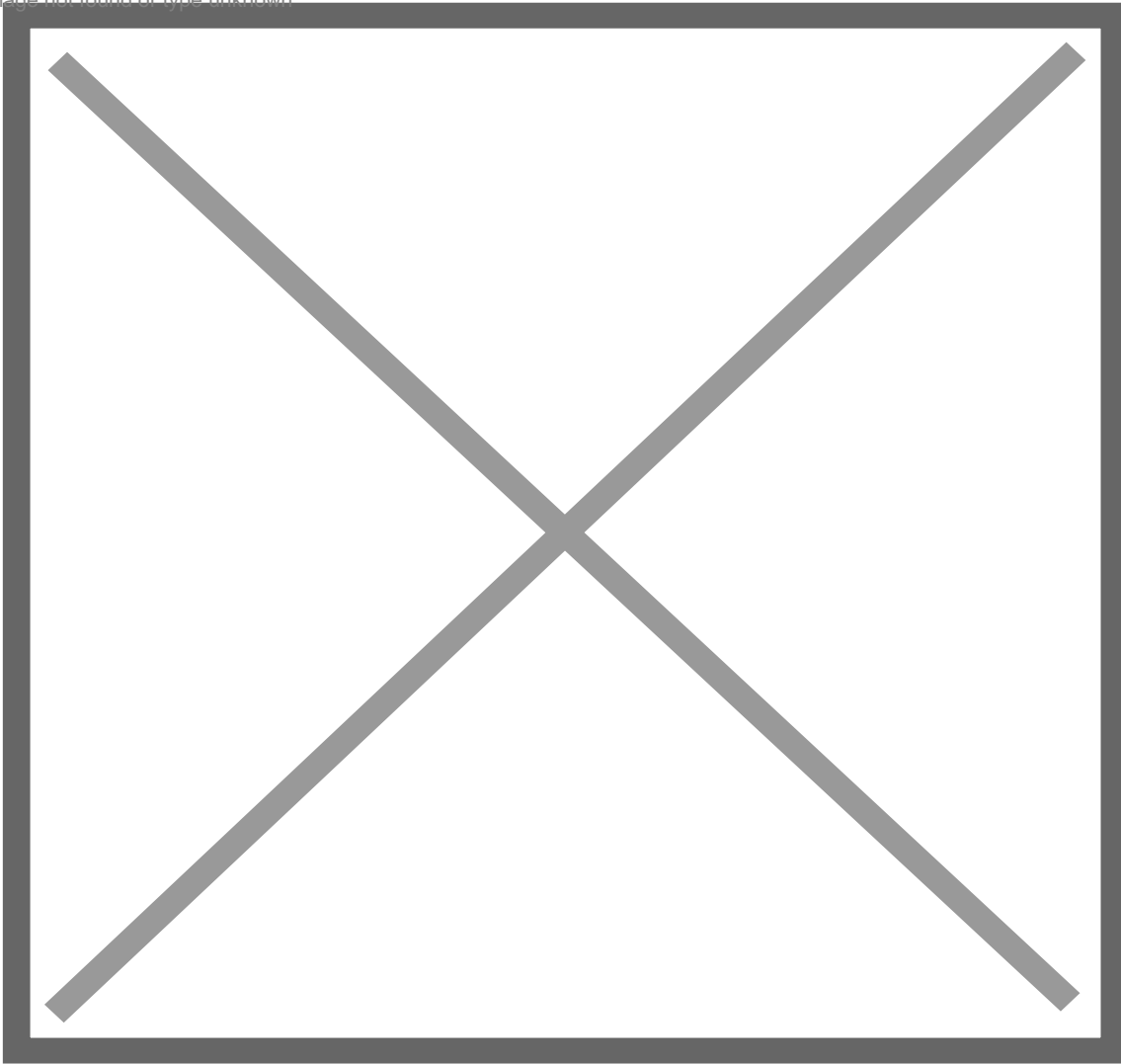
On November 10, World Health Organization (WHO) Spokesperson Margaret Harris said that 20 out of Gaza's 36 hospitals were currently non-operational. The Palestinian health ministry has now warned that all hospitals in the Gaza Strip will be dysfunctional within the next 48 hours unless they receive urgent medical aid.

Ghazi Hamad, a senior Hamas official, has once again rejected Israeli claims about al-Shifa Hospital being a command post for fighters as "false and misleading propaganda."

"The occupying forces have no evidence to prove it," Hamad said. "We have never used civilians as human shields because it goes against our religion, morality and principles."

Last month, Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari displayed "simulated" images allegedly showing Hamas "command centers", but later acknowledged: "This is only an illustration."

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Ashraf al-Qudra, a spokesman for Gaza's Health Ministry, said the hospital repeatedly invited international organizations to tour al-Shifa to confirm its neutrality.

Palestinians in Gaza have been witnessing an unending cycle of bloodshed for 39 consecutive days. Israel's fresh airstrikes have claimed dozens more civilian lives across the besieged territory.

Israel earlier boasted that more than 10,000 bombs and missiles had been dropped on Gaza City alone. According to the Geneva-based Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, the explosives used on the enclave as of November 2 may be twice as powerful as a nuclear bomb, thus exceeding the TNT-equivalent of Little Boy, the 15-kiloton atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

On November 5, an Israeli cabinet minister, Amichai Eliyahu, dropped another type of bomb by suggesting that the use of nuclear weapons on Gaza was an option. While he was "suspended" from the cabinet, his remarks may well have been the first time a sitting Israeli official confirmed publicly the open

secret of Israel's nuclear arsenal.

A right-wing Israeli minister now says the regime is rolling out a second Nakba in Gaza, in a reference to the forced expulsion of millions of Palestinians in 1948.

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