

Babies evacuated from al-Shifa and transferred to southern Gaza

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Rafah, November 19 (RHC)-- The most vulnerable patients at al-Shifa Hospital – dozens of prematurely born babies in critical condition – have been evacuated to the south of the Gaza Strip. Of the 39 babies who had been left without incubators when al-Shifa Hospital was left short of fuel and medical supplies after Israeli forces raided on Wednesday, 31 have made it out.

Mohammed Zaqout, director-general of hospitals in Gaza, told journalists that “all 31 premature babies in al-Shifa Hospital ... have been evacuated” along with three doctors and two nurses, and “preparations are under way” for them to enter Egypt.

Al Jazeera’s Tareq Abu Azzoum, reporting from the Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza, said the babies were on their way to southern Gaza hospitals. Six Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) ambulances transported them, in an effort coordinated with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the group said in a post on its Facebook page.

Israeli forces ordered doctors, patients and displaced people at Gaza’s al-Shifa Hospital to evacuate the medical compound, forcing some to leave by gunpoint, doctors and Palestinian officials told Al Jazeera on Saturday.

A WHO team that visited the hospital on Saturday reported that there were still hundreds of patients there, including many in extremely critical condition, trauma patients with severely infected wounds, and others with spinal injuries who are unable to move.

“Patients and health staff with whom they spoke were terrified for their safety and health, and pleaded for evacuation,” the agency said, describing al-Shifa as a death zone. Doctors said that four babies had died during the raid.

The babies were transferred to the south of Gaza “in preparation for their transfer to the Emirates Hospital in Rafah,” the PRCS said.

Later in the day, Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesperson for the Health Ministry in Hamas-controlled Gaza, told a news conference that the babies had been moved to Tal al-Sultan Hospital in Rafah and will be sent to Egyptian hospitals with their families tomorrow.

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