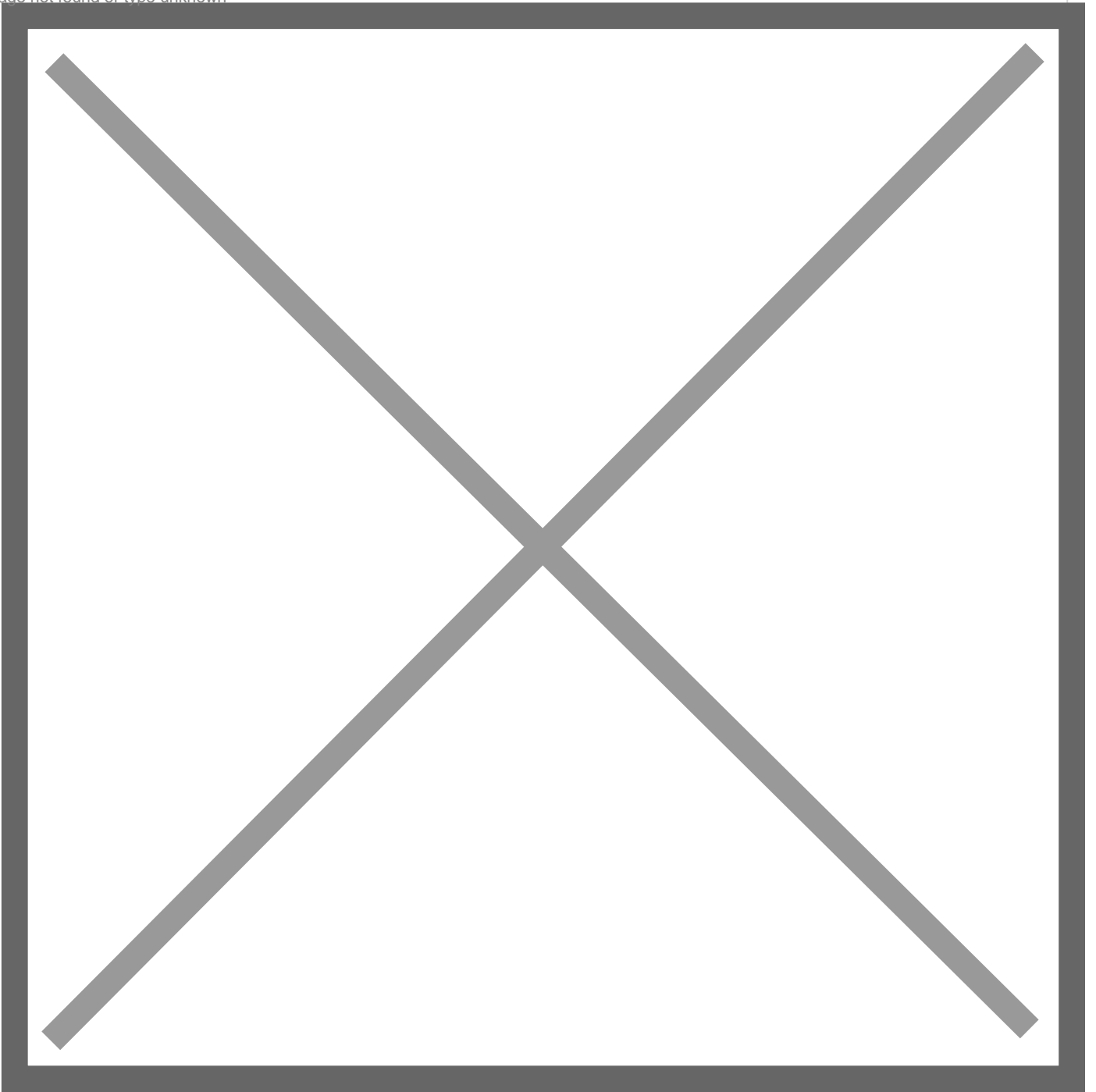


*Death toll tops 20,000 as northern  
Gaza's last functioning hospital  
fails under Israeli onslaught*

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Gaza City, December 22 (RHC)-- Palestinian officials say the death toll from 75 days of Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip has passed 20,000 — or nearly 1% of the population of the besieged territory. At least 8,000 children are among the dead.

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8,000 children are among the dead.

On Wednesday, a World Health Organization emergency team reached the al-Ahli Hospital, which had been northern Gaza's last functioning medical facility where people could undergo surgery.

WHO team coordinator Sean Casey says conditions have further deteriorated, with the bodies of the dead placed in rows in the courtyard, patients who've gone weeks without needed surgery and growing rates of postoperative infections due to a lack of antibiotics.

Casey said: "What we found here is a hospital that's really almost completely stopped functioning. Two days ago, a number of staff were detained. Just last Saturday, we visited Al-Shifa, and they were telling us how they were sending surgical cases here because al-Ahli had some of the only operating theaters left in northern Gaza and Gaza City, and those are now no longer functional. They don't have specialists. They don't have surgeons. They don't have power. They don't have water. They don't have food."

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