

Catastrophic situation at Gaza's Nasser Hospital amid Israeli raid

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Khan Younis, February 15 (RHC)-- There have been scenes of chaos and panic at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis as Israeli forces stormed the medical facility in the southern Gaza Strip and Palestinians tried to evacuate.

The Israeli army has besieged the facility for weeks, isolating thousands of patients, medical staff and displaced families – many of whom remain trapped inside. Verified video footage showed those who tried to flee on Thursday came under attack after leaving the hospital.

Gaza Ministry of Health spokesperson Ashraf al-Qudra said Israeli troops were forcing 95 medics, 191 patients and 165 displaced people into an old building at the medical centre under “harsh conditions” without water, food or milk for the children.

“The Nasser Medical Complex is witnessing a catastrophic, worrying situation because of the dwindling medical capacity as fuel is set to run out in the next 24 hours, which directly threatens the lives of patients, including six on respirators in intensive care and three children in incubators,” al-Qudra said in a statement.

The Israeli army accused Hamas of using the medical compound to hold captives, but it hasn’t provided evidence for the claim. The Palestinian group, which governs Gaza, has vehemently denied it.

The raid has displaced patients and medical workers who spoke of terrifying and strenuous conditions. “I left with my husband, who is blind. I was doing kidney dialysis. They destroyed the walls surrounding us as well as the doctor’s room. They ordered us to leave and fired at us, fired bombs and rockets on our heads from the top,” patient Rasmeya Saleem Abu Jamoos told Al Jazeera.

“They demolished the building. We left from the door, and we walked through sewage along with my husband. The Israelis then took my husband, and I lost my two bags. I cannot find them,” she said.

The Israeli military, which used drones and loudspeakers to tell people to leave Nasser Hospital, said it opened “a secure route” to allow civilians to exit while medics and patients could remain inside.

However, witnesses and the medical NGO Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF) said those sheltering inside were afraid to leave after reports that people were shot at on their way out. The Israeli army also fired on people inside the hospital, including a doctor and a nurse. MSF described a “chaotic situation” in the hospital after it was shelled early on Thursday.

“Our medical staff have had to flee the hospital, leaving patients behind,” MSF said on X. It said one of its employee is unaccounted for and another was detained by Israeli forces.

The Israeli army damaged two ambulances in the medical compound on Thursday, the Health Ministry said. Israeli soldiers have also stormed the maternity ward and were “sweeping” the area, it added. Israeli soldiers “threatened those inside with killing and with direct gunfire”, the ministry said.

Ahmed al-Moghrabi, the head of plastic surgery at Nasser Hospital, recorded a message from inside the facility when Israel’s evacuation orders came in. “[The Israeli army] sent a hostage with cuffed hands into the hospital asking him to tell us that we should evacuate. And when people started really evacuating, they opened fire, and they shot at the people, and they killed the hostage as well,” he said.

Speaking to Al Jazeera late on Wednesday, he said thousands of people, including critically ill patients, are being delayed at Israeli checkpoints as they try to flee the area. He also described the situation at the hospital as “dangerous”.

Nasser Hospital, the largest health facility in southern Gaza, has been under siege for around three weeks. The bodies of several people killed by Israeli sniper fire in the hospital compound have been lying on the ground for days because it is too unsafe for staff to reach them.

Israeli forces across the Gaza Strip have repeatedly besieged and raided hospitals, alleging that the facilities are being used as command centres by Hamas fighters. Hamas denies the accusation and the Israeli military has shown no concrete proof of such command centres.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has described Nasser Hospital as a critical facility “for all of Gaza”, where only a minority of hospitals are even partly operational. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Wednesday that he was “alarmed” by reports from Nasser Hospital, which he described as the “backbone of the health system in southern Gaza”.

In October, in the first 36 hours of the assault on Gaza, Israel targeted Nasser Hospital as well as the Indonesian Hospital and al-Quds Hospital, killing dozens of healthcare workers. By the end of November, 30 of Gaza’s 36 hospitals had been hit by Israeli rockets. Currently, only six of Gaza’s hospitals remain partially functional.

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