

United Nations says Gaza hospitals on brink of total collapse from Israeli genocidal aggression



UN report says 136 strikes on Gaza hospitals have caused critical damage and casualties among medical personnel.

A view of the destruction following an Israeli attack on the courtyard of Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya [Khalil Ramzi Alkahlut/Anadolu]

United Nations, January 1 (RHC)-- A UN report says Israel's claims that Gaza hospitals are being used for military purposes by Palestinian armed groups are "vague" amid continuing Israeli attacks on health facilities protected under international law.

The report – released on Tuesday by the UN human rights office – said Israeli strikes targeting hospitals and their surroundings in the Gaza Strip have pushed the territory's healthcare system "to the brink of total collapse with catastrophic effect on Palestinians' access to health and medical care".

The 23-page report looked at the period from October 7, 2023, to June 30, 2024. During this time there were at least 136 attacks on 27 hospitals and 12 other medical facilities, inflicting significant casualties among doctors, nurses, medics, and other civilians while causing significant damage to, if not the complete destruction of, civilian infrastructure.

The report highlighted that international humanitarian law explicitly protects medical personnel and hospitals as long as they do not engage in or are not used to commit acts harmful to the enemy outside their humanitarian function.

"Insufficient information has so far been made publicly available to substantiate these allegations, which have remained vague and broad, and in some cases appear contradicted by publicly available information," the UN report said.

The deliberate destruction of healthcare facilities "may amount to a form of collective punishment, which would also constitute a war crime", it added. "The one sanctuary where Palestinians should have felt safe in fact became a death trap," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said. "The protection of hospitals during warfare is paramount and must be respected by all sides at all times."

Israel has in recent days escalated attacks on the besieged Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza, detaining its director. The World Health Organization said the Kamal Adwan Hospital's remaining 15 critical patients, 50 caregivers, and 20 health workers were transferred on Friday to the nearby Indonesian Hospital, which it described as "destroyed and non-functional".

Hamas dismissed Israel's assertion its members operated from the hospital throughout the 15-month Gaza war, saying no fighters had been there.

Former Israeli diplomat Alon Pinkas told Al Jazeera even if his country did provide evidence to back up claims that Hamas used medical facilities for military operations, it would not justify attacking hospitals. "There is a discrepancy between the big headlines ... and the failure to come up with the evidence to support this," he said.

While the Israeli military said more than 250 Hamas fighters were arrested at Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza, Pinkas noted even if that is true, it still "does not justify rendering the hospital inoperative".

The report called for credible, independent investigations into the health facility attacks, emphasizing the "limitations" of Israel's justice system in addressing the actions of its armed forces.

"It is essential that there be independent, thorough and transparent investigations of all of these incidents, and full accountability for all violations of international humanitarian and human rights law which have taken place," said Turk. He also urged that "all medical workers arbitrarily detained must be immediately released".

“It must also be a priority for Israel, as the occupying power, to ensure and facilitate access to adequate healthcare for the Palestinian population,” Turk said.

Israel’s war on Gaza has killed more than 45,500 people in the besieged territory, mostly civilians, according to the Health Ministry.

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