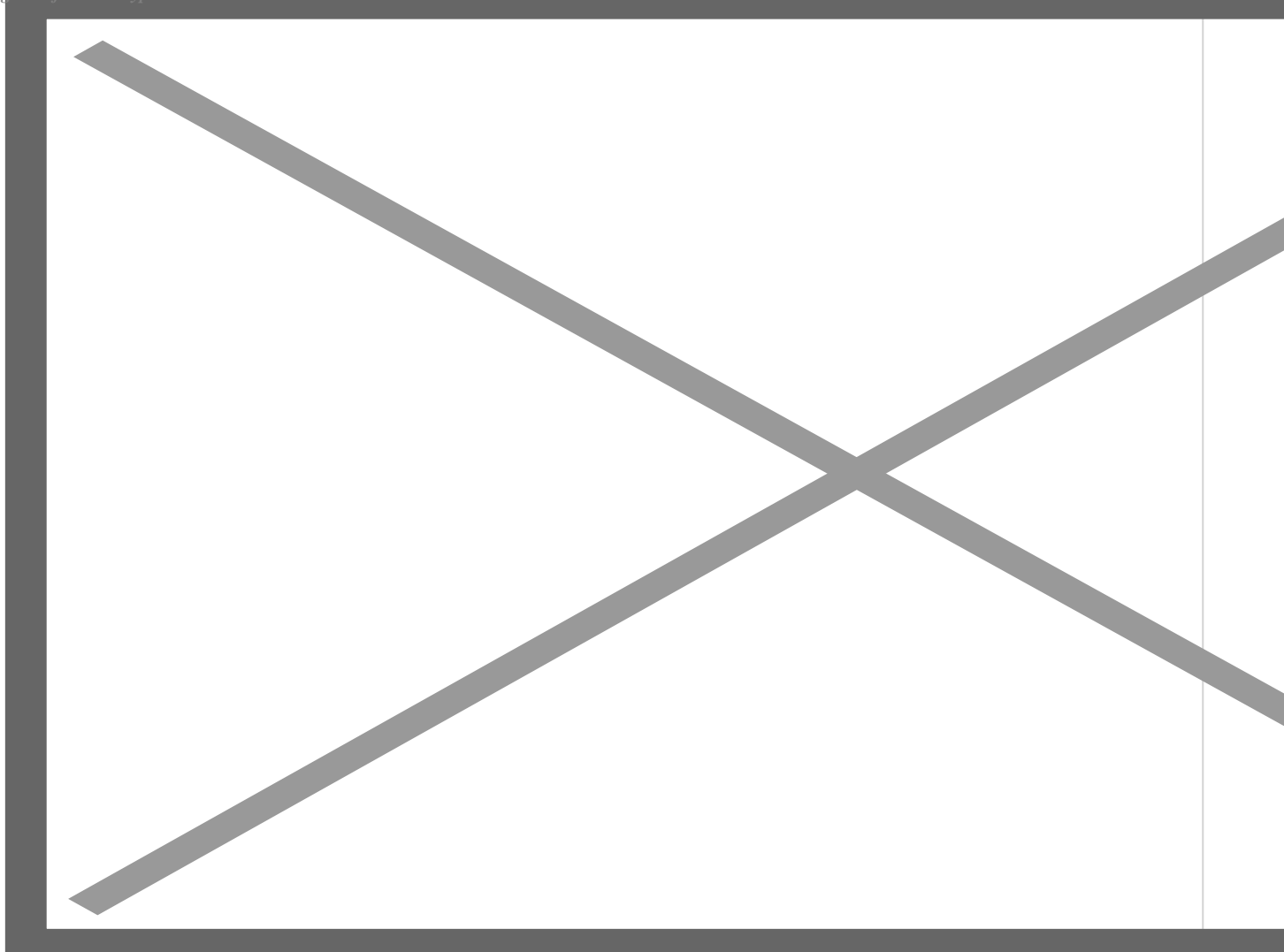


Israeli minister orders prisons not to vaccinate Palestinian inmates against COVID-19

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**Palestinian man walks past a mural depicting the coronavirus and a prison cell in Gaza City.
(Photo: AFP)**

Tel Aviv, December 28 (RHC)-- An Israeli minister has ordered prison officials not to vaccinate Palestinian prisoners against COVID-19, saying certain prisoners should not be given vaccines without permission. According to a statement from Amir Ohana's office, he has ordered the Israel Prisons Service to only vaccinate prison staff at this stage.

The prisoners will be vaccinated "in accordance with the progress of vaccinating the general public," the statement said, The Times of Israel reported. The announcement came after Qadri Abu Baker, the director of the Palestinian Authority's Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners Commission, said Palestinian security prisoners will be vaccinated in the next few days.

The vaccinations for the prisoners will not be compulsory, Abu Baker told Wafa news agency over the weekend, adding that the prisoners will receive the vaccine produced by the pharmaceutical company Pfizer.

Last week, a spokesman of the Detainees and Ex-Detainees Commission announced that a total of 140 Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails had become infected with the deadly virus. The spokesman, Hasan Abed Rabbo, called on international human rights organizations to intervene to save the lives of Palestinian prisoners at such a critical juncture.

The regime in Tel Aviv has an infamous "administrative detention" system, under which it imprisons Palestinians without trial or charge. Some prisoners have been held under administrative detention for up to 11 years.

Meanwhile, due to the novel coronavirus outbreak, Abu Bakr has termed 2020 as "the worst year for Palestinian prisoners" in Israeli prisons, owing to the regime's intensified violations of the prisoners' rights and the spread of COVID-19 in Israeli jails. "The prison administration raids and attacks detainees' sections almost every day," he told Anadolu Agency earlier this month.

The Israeli regime repeatedly takes reckless measures that threaten the lives of Palestinian prisoners. In July, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected a petition to implement COVID-19 protective guidelines for inmates at Gilboa prison. It also ruled that Palestinian prisoners have no right to social distancing protection against the highly infectious disease.

The coronavirus has so far infected a total of 133,093 people in Palestinian territories and killed nearly 1,310. Under Israel's vaccination campaign, even Jewish settlers living in the occupied West Bank will receive vaccines soon, but the 2.5 million Palestinians will have to wait much longer.

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