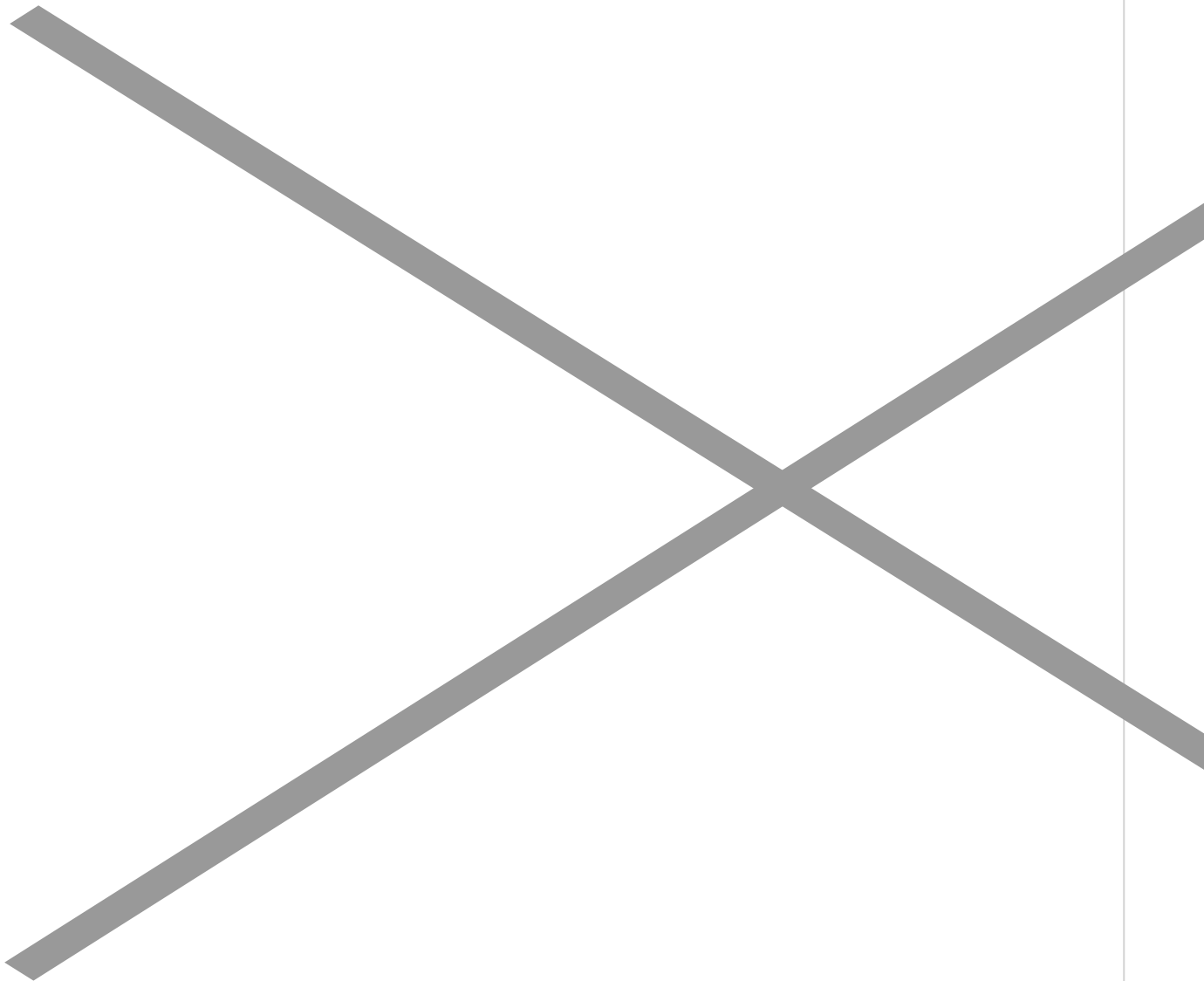


WHO chief says critical to protect hospitals in Israeli bombarded Gaza

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Geneva, January 15 (RHC)-- The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) has called for the protection of health centers in central and southern Gaza as the number of Palestinians killed in Israeli bombardment is nearing 24,000. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus made remarks on Sunday after a WHO team visited al-Aqsa hospital in central Gaza and the Nasser hospital in southern Khan Younis a day earlier.

"These facilities require sustained support and protection to remain operational. The increased hostilities in the south of the Strip are making it difficult for aid to reach them," WHO chief said on Sunday. At Al-Aqsa, he said, WHO learned patients are fleeing out of fear and the number of medical staff is low.

With more than 60,000 people injured so far, Gaza's healthcare system and its staff are on the brink of catastrophic collapse.

According to the WHO, only 13 out of Gaza's 36 hospitals are currently partially functional. Hospitals are facing critical shortages of basic supplies and fuel, and occupancy rates are now reaching 206% capacity in inpatient departments and 250% capacity in intensive care units.

Beyond casualties resulting from bombardment, Israel's siege, destruction of essential infrastructure, and the displacement of 1.9 million people, many into overcrowded shelters, are causing a public health catastrophe.

Gaza health ministry officials said during a press conference at al-Shifa Medical Complex on Saturday that only six ambulances are currently operational in the entire besieged territory. They also highlighted difficulties in operating essential services like intensive care units and child nurseries.

The ministry warned of a high risk of epidemics, particularly among displaced children and the elderly. The ministry, along with various medical NGOs, accused Israel of systematically targeting Gaza's healthcare system, including bombing medical crews and detaining health personnel.

The World Health Organization says it has no information about the locations of 600 patients and health workers at the Al-Aqsa Hospital in Gaza. It has urged international organizations to pressure Israel to release Gaza's medical teams.

The continued Israeli bombardment of Gaza has left 125 more Gazans dead in the past 24 hours, bringing the total death toll in Gaza to close to 24,000. It's estimated that around 7,000 others remain unaccounted for.

The remaining people struggle to remain alive. UN rapporteurs say half of the population is starving, and nine out of 10 are not eating every day. Schools, mosques, churches, Hospitals and ambulances have been a frequent target of regime strikes which have left only a handful of the medical facilities partially operational.

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