



A series of special position papers in light of the outbreak of the new Corona pandemic - Covid 19

Position Paper (4): The conditions of the Gaza Strip in light of the outbreak of the Corona Pandemic – the Israeli blockade threatens a disaster



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Introduction

Human Rights and Democracy Media Center "**SHAMS**", working in the occupied Palestinian territories publishes this fourth paper in a series of special position papers it launched in light of the outbreak of the new Corona virus pandemic, in which the Center sheds light on the siege of the Gaza Strip in terms of historical narrative and



“Failure to take remedial measures at present and implement them will exacerbate the water, electricity, education, and health problems in Gaza in the coming years. Gaza’s population will increase by half a million by 2020, and in return economic growth will remain slow. As a result, the population of Gaza will suffer and face greater difficulties in obtaining their needs of safe drinking water and electricity, as well as in sending their children to schools, urgent action must be taken now so that Gaza will be a suitable place to live by 2020, as living in it is really difficult now.

Maxwell Gillard – former United Nations humanitarian coordinator in the occupied Palestinian territory

examines the legal adaptation of the Israeli blockade based on International law as a crime of collective punishment in violation of Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and its violation of customary and written international law. The paper also examines the impact of the blockade, division and successive Israeli wars on the Gaza Strip and the exhaustion resulting from the Great Return Marches on all walks of life. The paper also examines the impact of the blockade, division and successive Israeli wars on the Gaza Strip and the exhaustion caused by the Great Return Marches on all walks of life, specifically on the important health system as a first line of response in the face of the outbreak of the Coronavirus. The paper also examines the feasibility and effectiveness of the measures taken in the Gaza Strip to confront the virus, reviewing the conditions of those quarantined in quarantine centers as a model for disassembly, leading to a set of recommendations that would

help the relevant parties to manage the greatest potential and ability to succeed in facing the crisis of the Corona virus outbreak in the besieged Gaza Strip. This paper considers the crisis as a new opportunity to overcome the Palestinian division and unite in the face of this collective and common human concern.

The besieged Gaza Strip suffers from a state of economic collapse and existential crises that hit all walks of life. These crises accumulate, become entrenched, and expand after nearly 14 years of the tight and continuous Israeli blockade imposed on the Strip. More than 2 million Palestinians live in a spot like a separate planet with an area of 365 km, and Israel controls about 24% of it as a "Insulator" zone. Thus, more than 2 million Palestinians, about 70% of whom are refugees living in the Gaza Strip, live an area of only 277 km. This makes the population density the highest in the world, reaching 6,000 persons / km, which turned the sector into a large cage closed from all directions. Statistically and according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and the official Palestinian authorities, the poverty and unemployment rate reached 75%, among the highest poverty rates in the world, while unemployment rates reached 70% among young people, 70% of the population in the Gaza Strip is food insecure. The hours of power outage reach 20 hours a day, and the water suffers from serious pollution that reached the groundwater reservoirs, and the only outlet (the Gaza Sea) is 70% contaminated by municipalities pumping wastewater along the beach without treatment. About 40% of the youth in the Gaza Strip, who are the majority of the society, want to emigrate, according to the latest statistics. In light of this reality and despite the repeated calls by Palestinian and international human rights organizations, no significant change has taken place. Rather, living conditions in Gaza have worsened with the passage of years, which has made all sectors of life extremely fragile and vulnerable to collapse at any time especially the health sector. By analyzing the factors, three main factors contributed

to the arrival of the standard of living and services to this unprecedented level of deterioration:

1. The tightened Israeli blockade on land, sea and air.
 2. The internal Palestinian division, which made the humanitarian aid to the sector or its shares of the budget subject to political tensions, as well as punitive measures, as many countries reduced their support to the sector.
 3. Population density: which is considered the highest in the world at a rate of 6.000 individuals / sq km, with a permanent decrease in resources and aid.
1. These crises are doubled with the outbreak of the new Corona virus, and the Gaza Strip recorded a number of (13) infections to date (1), in light of these exceptional and dangerous circumstances,

The blockade of the Gaza Strip in International Law- The threat of Continuous Israeli Crime increases with the Outbreak of Corona

In June 2007, "Israel", the occupying power, imposed a comprehensive blockade on the Gaza Strip, including preventing entry and exit for all citizens and goods, including health and medical supplies, isolating 365 square kilometers from the world, and in September 2007 Israel declared the Gaza Strip a hostile region, claiming that the blockade constitutes an act of self-defense. Despite this, "Israel" did not clarify the goal of imposing the blockade, which includes closing the five military checkpoints between the Gaza Strip and Israel. These are: **Erez - Beit Hanoun, Karni - Al Muntar, Sofa - Al Awda, Nahal Oz - Shujaiya, and Kerem Shalom - Kerem Abu Salem**. This land blockade was accompanied by a naval blockade that reduced the quantities of fuel and electricity allowed into the Gaza Strip, and the prevention of freedom of movement for all citizens, including patients, which led to disastrous results for the sector.



By adapting this act legally and dismantling it, the blockade imposed by "Israel" the occupying power on the Gaza Strip appears to be totally illegal due to its contradiction with the occupying powers' obligations towards the civilian population living under its occupation in accordance with international law. In all cases where siege policies are used in armed conflicts, customary international law must be adhered to on the matter derived from Article 54 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, particularly the Fourth Convention, which prohibits starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and prohibits destruction and / Or attacking civilian objects and materials indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas, crops, livestock, drinking water facilities and their networks, irrigation works, and others. is the exact opposite of what Israel is doing. Accordingly, the blockade is considered a collective punishment (1) that violates the rights of the population and aims to increase their

suffering. The report of the UN Special Committee on Investigating Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arab Population in the Occupied Territories on October 31, 2016, reaffirmed that the blockade of the Gaza Strip is a violation of international humanitarian law, in addition to dozens of reports issued by various organizations, including the International Red Cross.(2)

The Israeli occupation army launched three major wars against the Gaza Strip. These wars targeted all sectors and fields of all kinds, including the Palestinian health sector in the Gaza Strip, whether through direct targeting of buildings and medical and emergency personnel, or cutting supplies, and the scarcity of medical equipment, tools and medicines as a result of closures and blockades Or, the cumulative fatigue left by the wars on the health sector as a result of the huge number of victims who exceed the capacity of the health sector to absorb, these wars can be intensified as follows:

- **The First War: On December 27, 2008**, Israel launched its first major war on the Strip, which it called "Cast Lead." This war lasted 21 days, and 80 Israeli warplanes launched a series of raids on dozens of Palestinian security and government headquarters. As a result, 200 Palestinians were killed in the first air attack, most of them civilian police. After eight days, the occupying power decided to launch a large ground military operation with the participation of artillery, infantry and tanks, using internationally criminalized weapons against unarmed Palestinian civilians, most notably the burning white phosphorous and dilute uranium. The number of Palestinian victims reached 1,463 deaths, including 410 children, 104 women, and about 100 elderly people, and 5,400 others were injured, half of them were children, many of them with permanent disabilities. Israel destroyed 581 public institutions, including 31 offices of a non-governmental organization, 53 institutions of the United Nations, and 695 commercial establishments, while its war stopped 3,900 industrial establishments from working, causing 40 thousand people in the agricultural sector and 90 thousand in other sectors to lose their work

- **The second war: On November 14, 2012**, Israel launched its second war on the Gaza Strip, which it called the "pillar of clouds" and lasted for 8 days. The war began as a result of the occupation state's assassination of a high-ranking Palestinian military leader, after it deceived the Palestinian factions that had previously reached a truce agreement with Egyptian mediation, this war caused the deaths of 174 Palestinians, including 42 children and 11 women, and injured about 1,400 others, including 465 children, 254 women, and 91 elderly.
- **The third war: On July 7, 2014**, Israel launched its third war on the Gaza Strip, which it called "Protective Edge" and continued for 51 days, making it the longest and most violent Israeli war on the Strip. Throughout this period, Israel bombed the Gaza Strip by land, sea and air. Throughout this period, Israel has bombed the most populated sector in the world, and carried out about 60,664 raids on it, killing 2,322 Palestinians, including 578 children (ages one month to 16 years), 489 women and 102 elderly, 16 journalists, and wounding 10,870 Palestinian. During this war, the occupying power committed 144 massacres against 144 families, as it killed at least three members of each of these families. The occupying power completely demolished 12,000 housing units, and partially 160,000 units, of which 660 were uninhabitable. Israel also targeted UNRWA headquarters in the Middle East with bombing twice, destroying food aid stores for the displaced and homeless as a result of the war, 62 mosques were completely destroyed and 109 other mosques were partially destroyed, a church was partially destroyed, 10 Islamic graves and a Christian cemetery were destroyed, 9 water treatment plants were targeted, 18 electrical installations, 19 financial and banking institutions, 372 industrial and commercial establishments, 55

fishing boats, 222 schools, including 141 government schools, 76 UNRWA schools, 5 private schools, 6 universities, 48 societies, and one power plant. "Israel" left behind explosive remnants of war to pose a constant threat to civilians and attempts to rebuild. 16 people were killed, including 48 children, while 97 were injured as a result of accidents resulting from the explosion of the remnants of the Israeli war, while there are 40 inhabited houses with suspected unexploded Israeli bombs and missiles below them distributed throughout the Gaza Strip. The losses of the national economy in the Gaza Strip in all its sectors amounted to about \$ 5 billion. More than 500 large, strategic, medium and small economic establishments were affected. As for the agricultural sector losses, it amounted to 550 million dollars. During the war, Israel completely destroyed 64 mosques and 160 partially, exposed more than 4 thousand fishermen who support 50 thousand people to losses exceeding 6 million dollars, and raised the number of the unemployed to about 200 thousand persons, who support 900 thousand people.

- At the level of the health sector: during its first war, Israeli aircraft targeted 60 health institutions with the aim of destroying them. 15 hospitals were bombed and 29 ambulances were destroyed. Israel also killed 13 medical workers and injured 22 people. During its second war, Israel killed 2 medical personnel and injured 5, and damaged 10 health centers, including: 4 hospitals and a primary health care center. While in its third war, the occupying power destroyed more than 10 hospitals and 19 health centers, and also destroyed 36 ambulances and killed 23 medical staff and 11 UNRWA workers, which clearly shows the systematic and deliberate targeting of the health sector. The health system has been exhausted and has been depleted as well as a result of these wars and other rounds of violent

Israeli escalation that usually last from days to a week, accompanied by a huge number of victims and injured. This weakens Gaza Strip in the face of the Coronavirus and creates new threats to the Palestinian population in it, and adds more vulnerability to the health sector structures and more doubts about their preparedness and ability to confront the virus.

Coronavirus arrives in the Gaza Strip – A Terrifying Scenario

In December 2019, in the city of Wuhan, central of China, the emerging disease COVID-19 Corona was discovered, the highly contagious virus quickly turned into a pandemic (1), according to what was classified by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. Palestine announced in early March 2020 that the first 7 injuries were recorded for workers in the Angel Hotel In the city of Bethlehem. To date, the number of injured people around the world has reached (1) one million and 276 thousand injuries and more than 70 thousand deaths. While the injuries in Israel amounted to 8904 injuries and 57 deaths. In Palestine, the number of injuries reached 260 injuries and one death. This virus has negatively and greatly affected many sectors of life, and it has also affected the international system, creating economic, social and psychological crises, which are manifold as a consequence of the health crisis. On the fourth of this March, the Palestinian President declared a state of emergency in all Palestinian territories for a month, in efforts to confront the Corona pandemic, based on the basic system of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the amended Basic Law of 2003 and its amendments, especially the provisions of Chapter Seven thereof, according to the decree: The competent authorities take all necessary measures to confront the risks resulting from the Coronavirus, protect public health, and achieve security and stability, and this state of emergency is for a period of 30 days, and the prime minister is authorized with the powers and competencies necessary to achieve all the goals of this declaration. Which was later extended for another month.

On March 22, 2020, the Palestinian Ministry of Health announced the registration of the first two cases of the emerging coronavirus, Covid-19, in the Gaza Strip of citizens returning from Pakistan who were quarantined at the borders of the Strip, given the health, environmental, economic, living, water and other conditions of the sector, and so on, this access seems to be a very dangerous matter, especially if we link it to the overpopulation that the sector suffers from and the collapse that affects most sectors, especially the health system.



"I went to Al-Razi Hospital a few weeks ago and went to the emergency department. The electricity was cut off while I was there and before the generator started working, the doctors had to manually pump oxygen into the lungs of children placed on ventilators. This does not happen for one day, but it repeats every day".

Jimmy McGoldrick, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 25 October 2018

The health system in the Gaza Strip - collapse under the weight of blockade, Israeli violence, and the need to confront Corona

During the 14 years of the strict Israeli blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip and restrictions on the freedom of movement of individuals and goods, including medical resources, and with what this blockade created from multiple crises, including in the field of energy and electricity, which coincided with an internal Palestinian division that doubled the suffering, and the wars waged by the state The occupation of the sector, the health sector has suffered from enormous pressures and burdens that have led to severe weakness in the structure of this sector, and its suffering from a massive and permanent shortage of equipment, supplies, antibiotics, chemotherapy drugs, etc. On

average 27% of the essential medical consumables list is less than the supplies covering a period of one month during 2018 (1).

Hospitals and clinics in the Gaza Strip depend on fuel to supply emergency generators, as a result of power cuts. Thus, the fuel shortage is putting patients at

risk, as medical teams have to manually help the children to breathe till the maintenance engineers can repair the equipment. As well as the effect of power fluctuations on reducing the life of sensitive hospital equipment.

One of the challenges that added a burden to the health sector was the large number of casualties during the peaceful "Great Return" marches, which drained and exhausted the health sector and affected its ability to provide basic services. As precautionary surgical interventions were suspended, hospital beds were redistributed to serve surgical patients, health workers and ambulances were transferred, and pressures on auxiliary health services such as washing, ironing and hospital cleaning increased. The need for rehabilitation services in the fields of physical and psychological health also increased as a result of the excessive force used by the Israeli occupation state against Palestinian civilians during the peaceful marches. As well as direct Israeli attacks on health care in the Gaza Strip. Refusal or obstinacy in approving medical treatment permits for patients or injured people who need more advanced facilities outside the Gaza Strip and using them in multiple cases of extortion. The percentage of approval for permits submitted by patients has decreased to very low levels.

On 11/20/2012, Israeli warplanes bombed the Jordanian field hospital in the Tal Al-Hawa neighborhood in the southwest of Gaza City. On 07/21/2014, "Israel" bombed the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Hospital in Deir Al-Balah with about 30 shells. The bombing targeted the third floor where the operating room is located, killing 4 people and wounding 70, including doctors and nurses, and stopped the main operating room and the oxygen production plant. On the same day, ambulances were bombed and two paramedics were wounded. In the same year, during the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, the occupation warplanes launched an attack with at least one missile on the outpatient building inside the Shifa Medical Complex, the largest hospital in Gaza City. Israeli artillery bombed a hospital for elderly care and medical rehabilitation

in the Shejaiya neighborhood, east of Gaza City, with several shells. These are war crimes against the health sector, for example, but not limited to, which confirms that weakening the Palestinian health sector in the Gaza Strip and pushing it to collapse is part of a long and systematic Israeli policy. Then the Corona virus outbreak crisis will add additional burdens to the already exhausted medical sector.



Today, in light of the outbreak of the Coronavirus, the health sector is emerging as the first line of defense and confrontation, but (96) respirators, of which (63) are in Ministry of Health hospitals, and (110) beds, of which (78) are in Ministry of Health hospitals only are used for intensive care in the sector to serve more than two million people. This prompted the World Health Organization to expect that the sector would be able to deal with the first 100 injured, and then it would be completely dependent on foreign aid in the event of new injuries recorded. Accordingly, health authorities in the Gaza Strip need intensive care rooms, respirators, diagnostic devices and chips for those infected with the Coronavirus, preventive tools for

medical personnel, and medical drugs for combating the outbreak of the Corona virus.

Measures to Confront The Corona Virus in the Gaza Strip – Feasibility and effectiveness

The governmental follow-up committee to confront the spread of the Coronavirus in the Gaza Strip announced the closure of the crossings with Egypt and the occupation state, the prevention of gatherings of more than a hundred people, the conduct of analyzes on any suspect, the suspension of Schools, and the application of home quarantine on hundreds of returnees to the Strip for a period of two weeks. On March 17, 2020, the Ministry of Interior and National Security announced the

“The Ministry of Health has ended the compulsory quarantine of about 1,400 citizens who were in schools, hotels and hospitals, and is still monitoring the health status of 632 hosts in 17 quarantine centers. The central laboratory lacks laboratory materials for examining the Corona, and the Ministry of Health is still following the increasing numbers that want returning to the Gaza Strip from Egypt requires doubling efforts. The returnees will be hosted for 21 days, and this period can be increased due to the lack of laboratory examination materials and the shortage of medical materials.

Ashraf Al Qoudra -
spokesperson for the Ministry
of Health in the Gaza Strip,
4/11

release of all prison inmates who have spent two-thirds of the period and the granting of home leave to detainees and prisoners against the background of financial fines and minor misdemeanors for a period of one week, renewable, and the educational facilities have relied on e-learning.

Despite this, these measures are not considered sufficient in light of the high population density that strikes at the depth of the social distancing policy aimed at preventing the virus and which produces crises that are branching out of it such as: overcrowding in rooms, sharing beds, sharing bathrooms and personal hygiene tools ... etc., and poor health services as a result of the weakness of

the health facility, which is considered the safety valve in the face of the virus, and the disastrous economic conditions of the population in light of widespread poverty and unemployment prevent them from storing foodstuffs or obtaining their needs of

sterilizers, detergents and antibiotics. In addition to the ongoing funding crises of the UNRWA that provides an important part of health services to the refugees, who amount to about 70% of the population of the Gaza Strip, according to the Palestinian Central bureau of Statistics.

The reality of quarantine Centers in Gaza Strip – A model of Confusion

According to the testimonies received from (787) citizens who have been placed in compulsory quarantine in the Gaza Strip until Friday 4/10/2020, they were transported by overcrowded, unsterilized buses, and they were quarantined in places that lack public safety conditions and requirements. These places are a group of schools that do not contain individual or qualified rooms, and there are no sleeping beds. Some of these rooms have more than 5 mattresses and about 10 people may sleep in them without taking into account the privacy of patients, children, women, the elderly and people with Disability. There are no clean and adequate health facilities, which is a situation that prevents the possibility of showering inside the quarantine, and the quarantines in the Gaza Strip suffer from a shortage of medical tools and sterilizers, as no materials are provided except for paper tissues and regular liquid soap, and no heating tools or sufficient quantities of food and drink are provided. There is an imbalance in its distribution and randomness. In addition, the quarantined patients do not receive treatment in a timely manner and in the required quantities, and some of them have ended their quarantine period without being allowed to leave. They are centers, in general, that do not have suitable conditions for human life. The quarantined persons received bad treatment from the official authorities and security men who received them upon their arrival from the crossings.

As a result, Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, announced, about two weeks ago, the start of work on establishing two quarantine centers containing a thousand rooms in the northern and southern Gaza Strip, which ended on March 11, 2020, and were handed over to government agencies, according to what the movement said. No details were available about its readiness until the moment of preparing this paper.



Recommendations of “SHAMS” Center

1. Calling on the international community to exert pressure on the occupying power, to oblige it, as the responsible authority, to provide Gaza Strip with the supplies, needs and medical devices in general, necessary to confront the Corona virus in particular, especially respirators and laboratory test strips, as quickly as possible, in accordance with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.
2. The international community have to provide urgent medical, health and humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip to enable it to confront the outbreak of the Coronavirus, in light of the collapse caused by the Israeli blockade of most sectors, the huge population density, and the spread of the virus in the countries neighboring the Gaza Strip.

3. Calling for fairness in spending the budget in spending on the health sector by the Palestinian government and solidarity funds and distributing financial aid to those affected by the Coronavirus crisis between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, so that the state of division should not extend in light of this pandemic, rather it should form an opportunity to overcome division and unite Palestinian efforts.
4. With regard to the health field, the World Health Organization, as a United Nations agency and the directing and coordinating authority within the United Nations system, must play an effective role in providing health care to the Gaza Strip, and monitor Israeli measures that violate the right of its residents to health and aim to push the health sector to collapse.
5. Provide protection, tools and comprehensive preventive measures in a timely manner to health personnel working in the facilities of the Gaza Strip, in order to ensure the health of the staff working in the facilities and prevent the virus from reaching them and thus the collapse of the completely dilapidated health system in the Gaza Strip.
6. The need for the authorities supervising the quarantine centers and the governmental follow-up committee in the Gaza Strip to respect the rights of quarantined citizens in accordance with the requirements of national and international laws and regulations and health protocols, especially the most vulnerable groups such as the elderly, women, children, sick and people with disabilities, by raising the efficiency of the quarantine centers in terms of capacity, food, medicines, sterilizers, heating and cooling devices, sleeping supplies, etc., and distributing awareness leaflets to them about their rights and duties and the parties to which they can resort to in case their rights are

violated on the one hand, and about the virus on the other hand. In addition to the provision of permanent doctors in the quarantines.

7. Urgently investigate the complaints of citizens in quarantine about their exposure to abuse and humiliation in some cases, and hold accountable the law enforcement agencies that carried out the violations in light of the results of the investigation, and publish them to the public within their right to access and obtain information.
8. Calling upon: the UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs in the occupied Palestinian territory to assume their responsibilities in preparing urgent reports and highlighting the violations of the occupation and its practices against the civilian population in the Gaza Strip and the health system, so that the occupying power can be held accountable in international forums.
9. Inviting international and national civil society organizations to play their roles in the field of monitoring, documentation, and lobbying and collective advocacy efforts, and to benefit from the membership of the coalitions in which they participate, regarding the health situation in the Gaza Strip in light of the outbreak of the new Corona virus. It also urges them to assume more effective oversight roles on the quarantine centers, to check the extent to which they observe the conditions of decent human life, and at the same time the competent official authorities, especially the Ministry of Health, play the same supervisory roles.
10. Urging Palestinian diplomacy to play a greater role in highlighting the catastrophic health and humanitarian situation of the Gaza Strip with the

outbreak of the Coronavirus, and calling on countries of the world to shoulder their humanitarian, moral and legal responsibilities towards the Strip.