

Obstruction of health care

Violations of medical human rights are commonplace in the occupied territories. Medical sanctuary does not exist for the Palestinians, whose hospitals and clinics are frequently raided by soldiers who arrest wounded from their beds. Medical personnel and patients alike are targets of violence in these raids. Troops have beaten doctors and nurses, and in at least one case which occurred on the grounds of Shifa Hospital in Gaza in December 1987, shot dead two Palestinians. Medical equipment has been damaged or destroyed so as to endanger Palestinian lives. Soldiers have even ripped out intravenous drips from patients' arms. As well, ambulances are frequently denied access to the wounded or stopped and searched while transporting them. Such delays have resulted in several Palestinians bleeding to death before reaching hospital. Troops have comandeered ambulances at gunpoint and used them as decoys to enter Palestinian communities to make arrests.

Thousands of Palestinians have been arrested during the uprising and held in Israeli prisons and detention centers where they are routinely denied proper health care. As a result, several prisoners have died after being denied proper medical treatment. One woman administrative detainee from Gaza, Tahani Abu Daqqa, miscarried her baby after being denied medical care when she started hemorrhaging in Ramle prison. When she first asked for treatment, the prison nurse «advised» her to have an abortion, as she was going to lose the baby «anyway.» Tahani refused and was

Huda Munir, nine months, from Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, lost her eye to a rubber bullet.

-Rick Reinhard



left bleeding on her cell floor. She was eventually taken to hospital where she miscarried her baby.

As well, medical care is severely disrupted during the frequent and prolonged curfews of Palestinian camps and villages. Often health teams are denied entry under curfew. Clinics, if allowed to open, remain empty because the population cannot leave their homes to attend them. Such curfews interfere with care for people with injuries, but also for those with chronic illnesses. Immunization programs have been seriously disrupted, as has prenatal care. Pregnant women are further affected if they go into labor under curfew. There have been reported cases of women being forced to sneak on foot into clinics to give birth to their babies.

Actions taken against medical personnel by the occupation authorities are varied and numerous. Doctors have been barred from their work in villages, refugee camps and hospitals and even punished for performing their medical duties. In one instance, a doctor from a refugee camp in Gaza was beaten by soldiers, tied to the hood of their jeep and driven around the camp after treating a sick child who came to his house under curfew. Physicians trying to reach health centers and hospitals have had their cars stopped and searched, often being humiliated and beaten in the process. It is difficult to know the exact number of medical professionals who have been arrested during the uprising, but conservative estimates range in the dozens, most of whom are held without charge or trial in administrative detention.

Israeli officials have also instituted cutbacks and made medical care more financially inaccessible to the Palestinian community as part of this front against the intifada. In July 1988, the military authorities issued new hospitalization regulations making three days advance payment mandatory for Palestinians upon admission. The cost per night in hospital is about \$150 - an amount which exceeds the monthly income of a large sector of the population. Accompanying this was the cancellation of all health development projects, a 20 percent health care personnel reduction and a two-thirds cut in the number of hospital days allocated for Palestinians in better-equipped Israeli hospitals. With these new measures, the occupation authorities announced unequivocally their intention to use medical care as a weapon against Palestinians in the occupied territories.

«Epidemic of violence»

«There is an essentially uncontrolled epidemic of violence by soldiers and police in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, on a scale and degree of severity that poses the most serious medical, ethical and legal problems.» This was the first conclusion reached by the PHR delegation after their visit to the occupied territories during the intifada. Then Defense Minister Rabin's infamous statement about using «force, might, beatings» to crush the uprising only made public what had been known to the Palestinians for some time: the policy of the occupation forces is to indiscriminately inflict maximum damage on the population. It has been conservatively estimated that tens of thousands of Palestinians have been injured during the uprising, and about one thousand killed. The number of those injured is particularly under-reported as, fearing arrest, many of the injured do not seek care at formal medical sites.

Methods of violence employed against the civilian population include live ammunition (including plastic bullets), rubber bullets, plastic-covered metal bullets, beating, tear gas and burns. The particular means of violence used by the occupation forces pose severe, problematic medical