



Palestinian Medical Personnel under Fire



**Report Addressing Israeli Military Forces' Attacks against
Palestinian Medical Personnel while on Duty during Peaceful Return
Protests**

(30 March - 22 May 2018)



The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights is an independent non-profit legal agency based in Gaza city. The Centre was established in April 1995 by a group of Palestinian lawyers and human rights activists in order to protect human rights and promote the rule of law in accordance with international standards, create and develop democratic institutions and an active civil society in Palestine in accordance with internationally accepted standards and practices and support all efforts aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights according to international law.

The Centre enjoys Consultative Status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations. It was granted three international prominent awards for its efforts in the field of human rights:

1. The 1996 French Republic Award on Human Rights; and
2. The 2002 Bruno Kreisky Award for Outstanding Achievements in the Area of Human Rights; and
3. The 2003 International Service Human Rights Award (UNAIS).

The Centre has wide relationships with human rights and civil society organizations throughout the world. It is an affiliate of five international and Arab human rights organizations, which are active in the international arena:

International Commission of Jurists

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), headquartered in Geneva, is a non-governmental organisation in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe and the OAU. Founded in 1952, its task is to defend the rule of law throughout the world and to work towards the full observance of the provisions in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. its membership is composed of sixty eminent jurists who are representatives of the different legal systems of the world.

Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme

The Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH) is an international non-governmental organisation dedicated to the world-wide defence of human rights as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Founded in 1922, FIDH has eighty-nine national affiliates in all regions.

Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (Euro-Med Network) is a network of human rights organisations and individuals from the Middle East, North Africa and the European Union, established in 1997. The overall objective of the Network is to contribute to the protection of the human rights principles embodied in the Barcelona Declaration of 1995.

International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC)

The International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC) is one of the most important international legal bodies. It is specialized in legal and judicial training. It includes more than 30 members of distinguished legal organizations throughout the world, including American Bar Association; Arab Lawyers Union; and Bar Council of England and Wales.

The Arab Organization for Human Rights

It is an NGO founded in 1983. It calls for respect and promotion of human and people rights and fundamental freedoms in the Arab World for all individuals on its land in accordance with international



The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

human rights instruments. The Organization signed an agreement with Egypt in May 2000, according to which its headquarter was moved from Limassol in Cyprus to Cairo.

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights is an independent non-profit non-governmental organisation dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights, the rule of law, and democratic principles in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Administrative Board

1. Riyadh Deeb al-Za'noun;
2. Jaber Metleq Wishah;
3. Nadya Yusef Abu Nahla;
4. Hashem Mohammed al-Thalathini;
5. Essa Mousa Saba;
6. Heba Akkilah; and
7. Lawyer Raji Sourani.

Director

Raji Sourani

Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

Gaza City 29 :Omar El Mukhtar Street, Near Amal Hotel, PO Box 1328

Tel/Fax (972) 8 2824-776 / (972) 82825-893

Khan Yunis Branch :El Amal Street, Branch of Jamal Abdul-Nasser Street, near the College of Education

Tel/Fax: (972) 8 2061-025/ (972) 8 2061-035

Jabalya Branch :Izzidin Building, Main Street, Near Abu Qamar Fuel Station, Jabalya Refugee Camp

Tel/Fax: (972) 8 2456336/ (972) 8 2456335

E-mail :pchr@pchrgaza.org

Webpage :www.pchrgaza.org

"Targeting the medical personnel and field Medical points by Israeli forces' snipers despite wearing the uniform and marked with insignia as codified in the international standards is clear and flagrant evidence that the targeting was intentional and direct. These practices are a stigma that will be added to the Israeli crimes black record" (Lawyer Raji Sourani.)¹

¹ Director of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) and winner of the Right Livelihood Award "Alternative Nobel Prize"

Introduction:

Since the beginning of the peaceful Return activities and protests in the Gaza Strip on 30 March 2018 and up to the time of issuing this report, the Israeli forces targeted the medical personnel, temporary medical points, means of medical transports and ambulances along the Gaza Strip border areas. According to PCHR's investigations and follow-up, the Israeli forces committed gross and serious violations that amount to war crimes according to the international humanitarian law against the medical personnel, medical transports and field hospitals spread along the border areas. As a result, a paramedic was killed and 223 medical personnel officers were wounded; 29 of them were hit with live bullets or direct tear gas canisters while the others suffered tear gas inhalation after the Israeli forces heavily fired the tear gas canisters at them when carrying out their humanitarian duty.

Targeting means of medical transport and ambulances dedicated for the evacuation and transportation of those killed and treatment of those wounded damaged 37 ambulances. Moreover, due to targeting the medical points and field hospitals, dozens of medical personnel officers working there were wounded and their work was obstructed.

According to PCHR's investigations into these attacks, the Israeli forces used excessive force in addition to the random use of fire and teargas, inflicting a high number of casualties among the medical personnel and damaging dozens of medical transports and vehicles and field hospitals in the areas of peaceful protests. It was observed in many cases that the Israeli soldiers monitored and took photos of the medical personnel before targeting them, according to eyewitness' accounts.

PCHR's investigations also indicate that medical personnel, means of medical transport and field hospitals working in the field were marked with distinctive insignia and easily defined as their officers were in their medical uniforms and the ambulances were clearly marked with Red Crescent and Cross distinguishing them from the other transports. Moreover, though the field hospitals had distinguishing marks, they were subject to the Israeli forces' attacks. PCHR's investigations emphasize that the Israeli soldiers made no effort to respect their legal obligations under the rules of international humanitarian law in order to respect and protect the medical personnel; particularly that none of these soldiers' personal integrity was subject to imminent threat.

The Return protests, which started in Friday, 30 March 2018, was distinguished by its totally peaceful nature and wide popular participation that included hundred thousands of civilians, including women, children, and elderlies from the Gaza Strip of different ages. The Israeli forces unjustifiably used excessive force to suppress hundred thousands of civilians participating in these Return March protests without threatening or endangering the life of Israeli soldiers. The Israeli forces' use of excessive force resulted in the killing of 86 civilians, including 12 children, 2 journalists and 3 persons with disability, while PCHR is still investigating into the killing of 20 other Palestinians, including 2 children, near the Eastern Cemetery, east of Gaza City. Moreover, 6,106 Palestinians, including

860 children and 158 women, were wounded; 200 of them are so far in serious condition while 32 of them had their limbs amputated.

The Israeli attacks against the medical personnel coincided with the deterioration of the Gaza health system as the health facilities, including hospitals, primary healthcare centers, and field medical points established along the border fence, suffer acute shortage of medicines and medical disposables. The health status has seriously aggravated due to the high number of persons wounded since the beginning of the Return protests, exceeding the capacity of the Gaza Strip hospital. Moreover, this high number of casualties led to depleting many types of medicine and medical disposables in the Emergency Departments (EDs), Operations Rooms (ORs), and Intensive Care Units (ICUs), bringing the deficit of medicines in those departments to 48% of the total necessary medicines and medical disposables. Further, the medical staff and surgeons are under permanent pressure due to the depletion of energy and resources in light of the high number of injuries that arrived at the hospitals over the days of Return March protests and many of them needing surgeries.

The different attacks against the Palestinian medical personnel officers, especially those working in the field, constitute a serious violation of the international humanitarian law and international human rights law and a serious indicator of violating the international standards which stipulate rules for the protection of the medical personnel, including paramedics, their vehicles and medical facilities. These serious violations and deliberate attacks against the medical personnel amount to war crimes according to the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, particularly relevant to the scope of protection provided to the personnel.

Impact of the serious violations against the personnel does not only affect their lives and integrity but also affects rights of others, particularly those civilians participating in the peaceful Return March who need different types of health care, hospital and treatment services, increasing violations of civilians' right to life, security and integrity.

Violation of the Palestinian Medical Personnel's Right to Life and Personal Safety

The Israeli forces intensified their attacks against the Palestinian medical personnel operating in the Gaza Strip during the peaceful Return protests. As a result, a large number of the said personnel were either killed or wounded in a flagrant violation of the international standards for the protection of these persons.

According to PCHR's documentation and Health Ministry sources, the repeated targeting of paramedics, doctors and nurses led to the killing of a paramedic and injury of 223 members of the medical personnel during the Return protests. Twenty-nine of them were shot with live bullets or directly hit with tear gas canisters fired at them while the others suffered tear gas inhalation due to the tear gas canisters heavily fired at them while carrying out their humanitarian duty of evacuating and transferring the killed and treating the wounded and sick. Many of the medical personnel officers wounded are so far suffering the complications of their serious injuries, which they sustained while carrying

out their humanitarian duty, and undergoing medical treatment in the Palestinian hospitals. the injuries among the paramedics and medical personnel resulted from directly targeting them by opening fire at or teargasing the ambulances, other means of medical transport and field medical points where the medical personnel work.

According to the testimonies PCHR's fieldworkers collected, the Israeli forces deliberately opened fire and fired tear gas canisters at the Palestinian medical personnel and field hospitals in the confrontation areas near the border fence. Those incidents recurred against the same medical personnel despite wearing their medical uniform. Most of the attacks against the medical personnel occurred when there was no threat posed to the life and security of the Israeli soldiers.



- **Paramedic Killed while rescuing Person Wounded in Peaceful Return Protests**

On 14 May 2018, one of the medical personnel members was killed when he was rescuing a wounded person during the Return protests near the Eastern Cemetery, east of Gaza City. Mousa Jaber 'Abdel Salam Abu Hasanein (36), a medical personnel member in the Civil Defense, was killed when the Israeli forces heavily and randomly opened fire and fired shells at the civilians participating in the Return protests and the medical personnel members, who were rescuing a huge number of wounded persons around 300 meters away from the eastern borders of the Gaza City. Paramedic Mousa was wounded with a bullet to the chest, and due to the intensive shooting in the area, he kept bleeding for 20 minutes before paramedics could transfer him to the Indonesian Hospital where he

succumbed to his wounds. PCHR's investigations emphasize that paramedic Mousa was working within the medical personnel of the Civil Defense and was killed when he was attempting to rescue a person wounded in the area (Ahmed Fayez Harb Shehadah (23) was killed after being hit with a bullet to the heart.)

Paramedic 'Alaa' al-'Abed Yousif Abu Ghanimah (32), from al-Shija'aiyah neighborhood in Gaza City and working within the Civil Defense rescue teams- al-Tofah Branch, was with paramedic Mousa Abu Hasanein when the latter was wounded. Abu Ghanimah said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"At approximately 13:30 on Monday, 14 May 2018, the Israeli forces heavily and randomly opened fire and fired shells at the protestors in the March of Return near the Eastern Cemetery in eastern Gaza City. My colleague, paramedic Mousa Abu Hasanein, went to provide aid to one of those wounded. While doing so, Mousa fell on the ground and was severely bleeding amidst the Israeli forces' heavily shooting at the killed, wounded and paramedics. After around 20 minutes, the paramedics could evacuate paramedic Mousa and took him to a wastewater treatment plant as there were no ambulances in the area. In the plant, we provided him first aid attempting to stop the bleeding resulting from his injury with a bullet to the chest. We then put him on a (zinco) metal plate and took him in a civilian car to the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza. On their way, Mousa fainted and in the hospital doctors attempted to save his life and gave him artificial respiration, but eventually he died."

- **Paramedic Wounded with Bullet to His Hand While Providing Aid to Wounded Person**

On 06 April 2018, paramedic Hazem Mahmoud 'Eid Abu 'Eid (25), from 'Abasan al-Kabireh village in eastern Khan Younis, was wounded to the palm of his hand while rescuing one of those wounded in eastern Khuza'ah, east of Khan Younis. Hazem is a volunteer paramedic in the Nursing Department at the Gaza European Hospital and works within the team of volunteers with al-Tawbah Chairty. According to PCHR's fieldworkers, the paramedic was wounded with a bullet that penetrated the palm of his right hand though he was wearing his paramedic uniform. PCHR's investigations indicate that the Israeli soldiers stationed behind raised berms along the border fence were monitoring and taking photos of the medical crew, including the wounded paramedic, who was dealing with those wounded in the area. About the circumstances of his injury, paramedic Hazem Mahmoud 'Eid Abu 'Eid said to a PCHR's fieldworker that:

"At approximately 13:30 on Friday, 06 April 2018, when I was rescuing one of those wounded in eastern Khuza'ah village, I felt something hitting the palm of my right hand. I then saw blood coming from my hand and my fingers painfully cramped. Two of my paramedic colleagues then carried me to an ambulance belonging to the Ministry of Health to take me to the Gaza European Hospital. The doctors there found out that I was shot with a bullet that penetrated the palm of my right hand, fracturing 4 fingers and in need for surgery. On 19 April, I underwent a surgery to fix internal metal plates in the fingers in the Gaza European Hospital and I am still receiving treatment."

- **Nurse Wounded with Live Bullet While Providing Aid to One of those Wounded**

On 06 April 2018, Nurse Jihad Anwar Kamel Abu Daqqah (29) from 'Abasan al-Kabirah, east of Khan Younis, was wounded while providing aid to those wounded and securing their transfer to the field medical point in the Return encampment in eastern Khuza'ah, east of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. Jihad is a nurse in a sport club and volunteer nurse in the Algerian Hospital belonging to the Military Medical Services. According to PCHR's investigations, the Israeli forces stationed in the northeastern side of the demonstrators opened fire, wounding the nurse who was wearing his medical uniform with a bullet that entered his left leg and exited his right leg. It should be noted that there was no threat posed to the security and life of Israeli soldiers in the area. About the circumstances of his injury, Jihad Anwar Kamel Abu Daqqah said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"At approximately 15:30 on Friday, 06 April 2018, when I finished providing aid to one of those wounded, I felt like an electric short in my legs, fell on the ground, and saw blood coming from both legs. It was clear the bullet came from the Israeli forces' side, northeast of where we were standing. I was then taken by an ambulance to the field hospital in the western yard of the encampment. After 20 minutes, I was referred to the Algerian Hospital. I knew later that I was hit with a bullet that entered my left leg and exited the right leg, causing lacerations in the tissues, blood vessels and nerve. On 15 April 2018, I underwent a surgery for the blood vessels, and now I feel so much pain and a tingle in both legs like an electric short."



- **Paramedic Shot with Explosive Bullet while Providing Aid to Person Wounded**

On 06 April 2018, Medical paramedic Murad Isamil Husain Al-Najjar (35), a paramedic from Khuza'a, east of Khan Younis working in the medical services in Rafah clinic, was wounded while he was helping the wounded and transporting them from the confrontations areas to the field medical centers in the Return camp in Rafah. According to investigations conducted by PCHR, the paramedic who was wearing the uniform saw a soldier pointing his weapon towards him.

Paramedic Murad Ismail Husain Al-Najjar said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

“At 16:00 on Friday 06 April 2018, while I was standing about 15 meters away from border fence near Rafah, I saw someone falling after being shot by the Israeli forces. Another colleague and I then headed towards him. During that, I saw one of the soldiers pointing his weapon towards me, and only few moments later, I felt that something hit me in the left thigh, and I fell to the ground feeling severe pain. I was transferred by an ambulance to Abu Yousif al-Najjar Hospital, where doctors found out that two explosive bullets entered the left thigh, causing a small hole, but when they exited, they opened a 10-centimeter hole. Moreover, I sustained burns in the right leg and shrapnel wounds in the pelvis. At 23:00, I was transferred to the Algerian Hospital in Abasan Al Kabeera in Khan Younis to continue my treatment. On 17 April 2018, I underwent a surgery and so far receive medical treatment.”

Nurse Directly Hit With Tear Gas Canister

On 13 April 2018, nurse Alaa' Adnan Husain Qudeih (20), a volunteer from Khuza'ah in western Khan Younis working for the medical team of Al Tawba Society, was wounded though she was wearing the white nurse uniform. This happened when she was providing aid to a person wounded in an area 150 meters away from the border fence adjacent to Khuza'ah village. According to PCHR investigation, the nurse was hit with a gas canister to her ankle, causing an ankle rupture. After she inhaled so much tear gas, she fainted.

Alaa' Adnan Husain Qudeih, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

“At 18:00 on Friday 13 April 2018, while I was helping a wounded 150 meters away from the border fence, east of Khuza'a, I felt a strong hit in my right ankle, fell to the ground, and fainted. When I woke up, I found myself in the Gaza European Hospital in Khan Younis. My mother told me that I'm here due to gas inhalation and I stayed there for 3 days. Later, I left the hospital feeling pain in my leg and I still receive treatment at the European Hospital. Until now, I cannot walk or move but with a crutch.”



Paramedic Hit with Live Bullet While Helping Wounded Person

On 27 April 2018, Mazen Jebreel Saleh Hasnnah (33), a paramedic from al-Shuja'iyia neighborhood in Gaza City working in the Military Medical Services, was wounded while helping a person wounded in the Return March protests in the border area, east of Gaza City (Malaka area) around 20 meters away from the border fence. According to PCHR's fieldworkers, the paramedic was hit with a live bullet that settled in his leg, and due to his serious health condition and the continuous bleeding he was immediately taken to al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, where he underwent several surgeries. PCHR's investigations confirmed that the wounded paramedic was wearing his uniform that is known by the Israeli forces, and the protesters did not pose any threat to the Israeli soldiers' life.

About the circumstances of his injury, the wounded paramedic said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

“At approximately 17:00 on Friday, 27 April 2018, the Israeli forces heavily fired live bullets and tear gas canisters at the protesters near the border fence in “Malaka” area, east of Gaza City, wounded many protestors. The Medical staffs and I approached the wounded persons, who were 20 meters away from the border fence. While helping a wounded person, I suddenly fell on the ground and saw my right leg bleeding. The paramedics immediately took me to the field hospital, where it turned out that I was hit with a live bullet that settled in the leg. Due to my serious health condition, I was immediately referred to al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, where I underwent several surgeries. Doctors removed the bullet and grafted an artificial artery in my leg. I stayed 2 days at the ICU and was then taken to the surgery department. I still receive medical treatment at the hospital due to my injury”.



Paramedic Wounded While Present in Ambulance

On 09 April 2018, ‘Emad Salah Taleb al-Buhisiy (34), a volunteer paramedic from Dir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip working for the PRCS, was wounded while he was in an ambulance transferring the Return March casualties and around 250 meters away from the border fence, east of al-Bureij refugee camp. PCHR’s investigations confirmed that ‘Emad was wounded after the Israeli soldiers directly opened fire at the ambulance he was traveling, revealing that the Israeli forces intentionally targeted the medical personnel. PCHR’s fieldworkers said that ‘Emad was hit with a live bullet by the soldiers stationed along the border fence, east of al- Bureij refugee camp .

Regarding the injury circumstances, paramedic ‘Emad Salah Taleb al-Buhisiy said to PCHR’s fieldworker that:

“At approximately 17:15 on Monday, 09 April 2018, the Israeli soldiers stationed along the border fence, east of al-Bureij refugee camp, heavily fired live bullets and tear gas canisters at the protesters, resulting in many injuries. The Israeli soldiers suddenly and directly opened fire at the ambulance, where I was. I then felt pain in my right leg which was bleeding and stepped out of the ambulance. After that, I was taken to al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah, where I received first aid and then referred to al-Quds Hospital. At al-Quds Hospital, doctors informed me that the

bullet cut my vein and caused laceration in the tissues and fracture to the fibula bone. I was then taken to al-Shifa Hospital, where I underwent a surgery, and then returned to al-Quds Hospital, where I stayed 16 days and underwent 2 surgeries. On Wednesday, 25 April 2018, I left the hospital and so far receive medical treatment ”.

Paramedic Wounded After Being Directly Hit with Tear Gas Canister

On 04 May 2018, Ramiz Isma'il 'Abed al-Hadi Hammad (36), a paramedic from the Western refugee camp, east of Rafah working for the Palestinian Civil Defense in Western Rafah, was wounded after being directly hit with a tear gas canister. PCHR's fieldworkers said that Ramiz was wounded while standing near the ambulance around 250 meters away from the border fence, east of al-Shawka village, east of Rafah. PCHR's investigations confirmed that the paramedic was wearing his medical uniform that is known to the Israeli soldiers, revealing that the Israeli forces intentionally targeted the medical personnel.

About the circumstance of his injury, Ramiz Isma'il 'Abed al-Hadi Hammad said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

“At approximately 16:00 on Friday, 04 May 2018, while I was helping wounded persons in eastern al-Shawka village, east of Rafah, I felt pain in my left arm and chest due to being directly hit with a tear gas canister, noting that I was standing near the ambulance 250 meters away from the border fence. Therefore, my colleagues took me via an ambulance to the field medical point in the Return Camp, east of Rafah. I was then referred to Abu Yousef al-Najjar Hospital in Rafah to continue the treatment. Doctors at the hospital classified my injury as moderate ”.



The abovementioned testimonies confirm that targeting the medical personnel by the Israeli forces was not only due to the use of excessive force or not distinguishing between the peaceful demonstrators, medical personnel, civil defense officers, and relief staff, but was within clear targeting aimed at intimidating and preventing them from providing any health or treatment services to the persons wounded in the peaceful Return March demonstrations.

Moreover, the facts on the ground indicate that the Israeli forces deliberately targeted the Palestinian medical personnel and this was not accidental or a mistake of one person. On the contrary, the last two months during the peaceful Return March witnessed repeated attacks against doctors, nurses, paramedics, proving that the Israeli forces have deliberately targeted and harmed the medical personnel working in the field.

The gross violations against the medical personnel not only affect their safety and life, but also affect the rights of others participating in the demonstrations who need various types of medical care and hospitalization services, increasing the amount of violations committed against civilians' right to life and maintain their safety and integrity. Moreover, inability of the medical personnel to work timely resulted in the death of many of those wounded and deterioration of the health condition of hundred others.



In spite of all violations against the medical staffers, including doctors, nurses and paramedics, they continued their job in rescuing the wounded and sick. The medical personnel have provided treatment and hospitalization services for whoever was in need for medical care despite the lack of medical capabilities, especially that dozens of types of medicines and medical supplies ran out. These humanitarian medical personnel have paid a high price, mainly those staffers wounded; they continued their job in an atmosphere of defiance and belief of their humanitarian message, revealing the Israeli crimes that should stop and ensuring non recurrence of such crimes by Israeli forces and their military machine.

Targeting Field Medical Points and Hospitals

The Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip, and in conjunction with the beginning of the Return March last 30 March, formed a higher emergency committee comprised of the Ministry, PRCS, military medical services, and other health bodies all over the Gaza Strip. This committee established many field medical points in all locations where the Return March activities were held in the border areas in order to treat those wounded in the Return March protests. The wounded are usually taken via ambulances from the demonstration areas to the field medical centers, where they are given first aid before referring them to main hospitals.

The field medical centers were established in areas that are 800 and 1000 meters away from the border fence and confrontation areas to facilitate the wounded's access to the centers and to be relatively away from the confrontation areas and Israeli soldiers' attacks .

The field medical centers, which are established near the confrontation areas in the Gaza Strip, contributed to alleviating dangers upon those wounded due to the Israeli forces' hostilities against them. The medical personnel also contributed to reducing the seriousness of injury and exposure of those wounded to death or to serious health complications due to their injuries. The medical personnel's efforts in the field before the arrival of the wounded at the hospital help to reduce the injury complications that may lead to death.

Specialists at the Emergency Department confirm that the first aid which is immediately given to those wounded helps in changing their condition from serious to moderate and those whose condition is moderate into minor.

Since the first day of their establishment near the confrontation areas, the field medical centers have worked in coordination with the different parties supervising the medical services. The medical personnel on duty facilitate treatment of the wounded in the field, alleviating the burden later on the governmental and civil hospitals when the wounded arrive at the hospital. It could be said that this would lead to two important things, the first is treating the those persons sustaining minor wounds, which do not need secondary healthcare services (i.e. hospitals), and the second is alleviating the burden and considerable pressure on permanent hospitals resulting from the relatively high number of injuries that are often higher than the hospitals' capacity and so saving additional effort and costs.

Since the first day of confrontations with the Palestinian civilians participating in the peaceful Return March demonstrations, the Israeli forces have attacked the temporary medical centers and field hospitals established in the border areas in disregard for the rules of international humanitarian law, which provides protection for these medical personnel. PCHR's fieldworkers confirmed that those attacks occurred despite the presence of field medical centers between 800 and 1000 meters away from the border fence and confrontation areas. The attacks have inflicted dozens injuries among the medical personnel and obstructed their work.



The Following are some cases, where medical centers and field hospitals were targeted:

On 13 April 2018, Israeli forces fired 10 tear gas canisters at a field medical center belonging to the Algerian Society established in Khuza'a village around 800 meters away from the border fence. As a result, dozens of medical staffers suffered tear gas inhalation.

On the same day, ambulance crews were targeted in Rafah and al-Bureij refugee camp, proving that the Israeli forces deliberately and explicitly targeted and obstructed the work of medical crews for the first time since the beginning of Return March. As a result, dozen medical staffers suffered tear gas inhalation while 4 paramedics were shot with bullets and directly hit with tear gas canisters.

On 20 April 2018, Israeli forces fired tear gas canisters which fell on the field medical center belonging to al-Barakah Algerian Association in Khuza'ah and its surroundings. As a result, the medical crews were forced to vacate for some time, noting it is 800 meters away from the border fence.

On 27 April 2018, Israeli forces twice fired many tear gas canisters which fell near the field clinic in eastern Bureij refugee camp, noting the clinic is around 450 meters away from the border fence. As a result, the medical personnel suffered tear gas inhalation and their work was disrupted.

On 04 May 2018, a tear gas canister fell on a filed medical center belonging to Isnad Community in the Return encampment in Khuza'ah village. As a result, dozens of medical staffers suffered tear gas inhalation and their work was disrupted.

Dr. Salah al-Deen ‘Ali Abdul Hafeez al-Rantisi, Head of the Primary Health Care in the Ministry of Health and Head of the Medical Center established in the Return encampment that was directly and several times targeted by the Israeli forces in Khuza’ah village, east of Khan Yunis, said to PCHR’s fieldworker that

“At approximately 13:30 on Friday, 13 April 2018, Israeli forces fired 10 tear gas canisters at the field medical center in the Return encampment in Khuza’ah village, east of Khan Yunis. The field medical center was around 800 meters away from the border fence. Two of the tear gas canisters fell inside the medical center while the other tear gas canisters fell near it. As a result, all the medical staffers, who were in the area, suffered tear gas inhalation and were treated on the spot; except Dr. Ashraf ‘Abdeen who was referred to thhe Algerian Hospital due to severely suffering tear gas inhalation. Due to this, we were forced to vacate the medical center though there wounded persons receiving treatment in it. On 20 April 2018, many tear gas canisters also fell in the vicinity of the medical center. As a result, medical personnel suffered tear gas inhalation. On 04 May 2018, gases emitting from the tear gas canisters fired by the Israeli forces reached the vicinity of the medical center and inside it, causing tear gas inhalation among the the medical staffers.”



PCHR’s investigations confirm that the Israeli forces’ attacks against field hospitals and medial points established for saving lives of the peaceful Return March victims, were intentional in most cases, especially that the field hospitals established in the Gaza Strip border areas were clearly marked with distinctive flags as stipulated in the international conventions which identify their role to vacate, transfer and treat the killed and wounded.

Despite this, Israeli forces have gone so far in violating the international rules for the protection of the medical personnel as codified in the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention and the 1949 First Additional Protocol to the Four Genève Conventions.

Targeting Palestinian Medical Transports (Ambulances)

Since the first day of the peaceful March of Return, Israeli forces attacked medical transports carrying those wounded in disregard for the rules of the international humanitarian law, which provides protection for the medical transports and vehicles.

Dr. Ashraf Al-Qedrah, Director of Public Relations and Media in the Ministry of Health, said to PCHR's fieldworker that 37 ambulances were partially damaged while carrying out their duty to vacate and transfer those killed and wounded who participated in the peaceful March of Return demonstrations to hospitals that are far away from the confrontations areas since 30 March 2018.



PCHR's investigations confirm that the Israeli forces deliberately targeted the ambulances designated for evacuating and transferring the killed and wounded, though they were clearly marked with insignia as medical vehicles. PCHR's fieldworkers also confirmed that these attacks caused Partial damage to dozens of ambulances and hindered the work of a number of them, rendering them out of service provided for the casualties of the Return March. The following are some cases where the medical transports were exposed to direct attacks by the Israeli forces:

- On 11 May 2018, Israeli soldiers fired live bullets at an ambulance while its crew was offering first aid to a number of persons wounded, east of al-Shawkah village, east of Rafah City. The ambulance was around 300 meters away from the border fence and there was no danger posed to the life and security of the Israeli soldiers. Concerning the attack, Mohamed al-Sharif Abdullah Sehweil (29), a paramedic from al-Zuhour neighborhood, north of Rafah working in the Military Medical Services in Rafah City, said to PCHR's fieldworker:
- "On Friday, 11 May 2018, I went to the eastern al-Shawkah village in eastern Rafah near the border fence to carry out my duty in offering first aid to the participants in the March of Return. I was wearing the medical personnel uniform within the Military Medical Services along with 2 of my colleague paramedics. At approximately 17:30, while we were aiding and transferring a number of civilians to the field hospital in the Return encampment, the Israeli soldiers fired live bullets at the ambulance that was 300 meters away from the border fence. A live bullet hit the right side and exited from the rear door. As a result, the ambulance was damaged and went out of service".
- On 11 May 2018, Israeli soldiers fired 2 tear gas canisters at an ambulance that was traveling around 300 meters away from the border fence, east of al-Shawkah village, east of Rafah. According to PCHR's fieldworkers, the tear gas canister penetrated the ambulance window and settled inside it. As a result, all the medical staffers who were four suffered tear gas inhalation.

According to PCHR's investigations, the ambulance was distinctive and its crew was transferring the wounded from the scene; moreover, there was no danger posed to the Israeli soldiers' security. This proves that the Israeli forces' attack aimed at hindering the medical personnel's work and rendering the ambulance out of service not being able to transfer the casualties of the Return March demonstrations. About the incident, Khalid Ibrahim 'Othman al-'Ajrami (38), a paramedic from al-Barazil neighborhood, south of Rafah, working in the Civil Defense in Rafah City, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"At approximately 19:00 on Friday, 11 May 2018, Israeli soldiers fired 2 tear gas canisters at our ambulance while we were transferring a large number of civilians wounded with the Israeli forces' fire near the border fence adjacent to the eastern al-Shawkah village, east of Rafah. The Israeli forces targeted the ambulance though we were committed to clearly marking it with medical insignia and wearing the paramedic uniform to be easily identified by the Israeli forces as medical transports. The tear gas canisters penetrated the left the window, breaking it and making all the medical personnel comprised of 4 persons suffer tear gas inhalation."



Use of Excessive Force by Israeli Forces to Suppress Participants in Peaceful Return March Demonstrations

On 30 March 2018, the March of Return demonstrations started protesting against Israel's denial of Palestinians' rights in the Gaza Strip and refusal to apply the UN Resolutions relevant to the refugees and their rights and condemning the Israeli tightening closure imposed on Gaza. The demonstrations were as always fully peaceful, as hundreds of thousands civilians of different ages from the Gaza Strip participated, including thousands of women, elderly and children. The participants raised Palestinian flags, chanted slogans and national songs, flew large numbers of kites and set fire to tires. In many of those gatherings, there was folklore and scout shows in addition to women gatherings; however, they were all under the Israeli forces' fire.

PCHR fieldworkers' observations undoubtedly refuted the Israeli government and some media outlets' claims that children are used as human shields by the demonstrators. This refusal was based on the totally peaceful nature of the demonstrations, participation of entire families, including children, and some women and children's offering water for the demonstrators and raising flags with no influence from any political party encouraging them to do so.



According to Field observations, Israeli forces unjustifiably used excessive force to suppress hundreds of thousands of participants in the demonstrations that were fully peaceful hundreds of meters away from the border fence with Israel, with no danger or threat posed to the Israeli soldiers' life. PCHR's fieldworker confirmed that dozens of Israeli snipers heavily and deliberately fired live bullets and tear gas canisters at the participants in the peaceful gatherings, inflicting killings and injuries among the demonstrators in the gathering points near the border fence, east of Khuza'ah village in Khan Yunis; east of Abu Safiyah Hill, northeast of Jabalia; opposite to the Memorial Statute, southeast of Beit Hanoun; east of al-Burajj refugee camp and east of Juhor al-Deek in the central Gaza Strip, opposite to the Return encampment and opposite to Karm Abu Salem crossing; and east of al-Sheja'eyah neighborhood in eastern Gaza City.

The Israeli violations against participants in the March of Return reached its peak on 14 May 2018 coinciding with the inauguration of the U.S Embassy in occupied Jerusalem. The demonstrations escalated following implementation of the United States' illegal decision to remove its embassy from Israel to Jerusalem occupied in 1967, and also coinciding with the Palestinian Nakbah (catastrophe), the displacement of Palestinians from their lands and the establishment of the State of Israel.

Use of live ammunition, artillery shells and teargas by the Israeli forces against peaceful demonstrators resulted in the killing of 86 civilians, including 12 children, 2 journalists, and 3 persons with disability since the beginning of the Return March. PCHR is still investigating the death circumstances of 20 persons, including 2 children. Moreover,

6,106 civilians, including 860 children and 158 women, were wounded since Friday, 30 March 2018.

The abovementioned high number of the killed and wounded, despite the peaceful nature of demonstrations, proves that there is an official decision to kill and bodily harm the demonstrators, in implementation of the intimidation policy adopted by the Israeli forces, their spokespersons and officials over the past few days in an attempt to reduce the popular participation in the peaceful gatherings.



The above confirms that that before the occurrence of the demonstrations –which were declared by the organizers to be peaceful calling for implementation of UN Resolution 194 and raising only Palestinian and UN flags- the Israeli forces sent letters to the organizers and Gaza Strip residents threatening them in case they participate in the demonstrations. In addition, the Israeli forces deployed snipers and the dog unit along the borders with Gaza as declared by Spokesperson of the Israeli forces on his Facebook page. The spokesperson also threatened that "if needed, we will respond in the center of the Gaza Strip against those behind these violent protests," Hinting about committing crimes of extrajudicial killings (assassinations.)

Deterioration of Health Conditions in the Gaza Strip

Health facilities in the Gaza Strip, including hospitals, primary healthcare centers and field medical points established along the Gaza Strip borders, suffer from chronic shortage of medicines and medical supplies that are necessary for treatment of and care

for civilians, particularly those who suffer from chronic diseases and those wounded in serious condition.

The health situation is getting worse due to the increasing number of the wounded since the beginning of the Return March activities on 30 March 2018 that is far beyond the capacity of the Gaza Strip hospitals and depletes many types of medicine and medical disposables in the ER, OR and ICU. This has constituted a major obstacle to the medical personnel's work regarding treating and caring for the wounded in those sections. Moreover, the medical personnel and surgeons are in permanent pressure due to the severe depletion of energy and supplies in light of the large number of injuries that reached the hospitals over the Return March days in addition to many of those wounded needing surgeries

The Ministry of Health in Gaza warned that the health sector in the Gaza Strip would experience considerable setbacks due to the deep crises faced by the Ministry because of the tightened closure on the Gaza Strip and the reflections of the internal political division and resulting humanitarian crises deeply affecting the Palestinian citizen. The ministry pointed out that the rate of medicine deficiency amounted to 48% in addition to the acute depletion of medicine types and disposables for surgeries, emergency and ICU in coincidence with the high increase in the number of the killed and wounded participants in the March of Return activities

Dr. Yusuf Abu al-Rish, Gaza's Deputy Minister of Health, said to PCHR's fieldworker that the medical services are in danger of falling apart due to the acute shortage of medicines and medical equipment, insufficiency of medical staffers, the Health Ministry Servants not receiving their salaries and severe scarcity of resources in the health facilities. Abu al-Rish added that the temporary emergency solutions followed by the ministry do not provide full treatment opportunity for the sick

Abu al-Rish confirmed that the current situation is the most difficult for the entire health system as promoting and protection of the health sector requires dozens of medicine types, healthcare supplies and disposables, laboratory materials, medical equipment and spare parts for maintenance of ambulances.

Abu al-Rish added that despite the precautions and necessary measures taken to deal with only emergency cases, it is difficult to cope with such incidents while having such huge deficit of the capabilities. There are hundreds wounded and other in serious condition waiting for treatment interventions, emergency and complementary surgeries and medical and rehabilitation follow-up. All these treatment stages require available adequate medicine stocks to allow the medical personnel to complete therapeutic protocols for both the wounded and sick. Abu al-Rish said that the huge increase in the number of those wounded is far beyond the absorptive capacity of the Gaza Strip hospitals, forcing them sometimes to make some cases in need for staying at the hospital to leave in order to accommodate new cases.



Dr. Abdul Latif Al-Haj, General Director of Hospitals in the Ministry of Health in Gaza, expressed to PCHR's fieldworker the urgent need for providing emergency medical requirements to the Gaza Strip hospitals, particularly the ERs which deal with hundreds of wounded civilians who participated in the activities of the Great March of Return, pointing out that the large number of injuries depleted many types of medicines and medical disposables in the ERs, ORs and ICUs. Al-Haj said that this depletion forms a major obstacle to the work of the medical personnel in order to carryout the treatment and surgery interventions for the wounded in these sections.

Dr. Mahmoud Matar, Orthopedic Surgeon at al-Shifa Hospital, said that the medical personnel and surgeons at al-Shifa Hospital suffer from pressure due to the sever depletion of energy and resources in light of the large number of injuries that reached the hospital over the March of Return days and need of many of them for surgeries.

Orthopedic Consultant Dr. 'Adnan al-Bursh said that the medical personnel in the ORs suffer from chronic shortage in analgesics, anesthetics, antibiotics and fracture stabilizers. He added that large numbers of injuries that arrived at al-Shifa Hospital are considered within the very difficult cases as dozens of the wounded suffer from laceration in bones, veins, arteries and nerves.

Targeting Medical Personnel in Light of the International Human Rights Law

The Israeli forces' attacks against Palestinian medical personnel, medical facilities and field hospitals designated for rescuing the March of Return casualties while evacuating and transferring the killed and treating the wounded in the border areas of the Gaza Strip, constituted serious crimes and flagrant violations of the international humanitarian law rules, particularly the international standards which stipulate rules for the protection of the medical personnel, including paramedics, their transports and medical facilities.

The international humanitarian law, which deals with international and non-international armed conflicts, stipulates that the High Contracting Parties shall undertake to respect the principle of freedom of movement for the medical personnel and work for providing the needed facilitations so that those staffers would carry out their duties, which include the evacuation and transfer of the wounded, sick, pregnant or post-natal women and the needed vaccines for children.

The Fourth Geneva Convention issued on 12 August 1949 relevant to the protection of civilian persons in times of war and the two Additional Protocols provide special protection for the medical personnel and humanitarian relief crews from Article (14) to (24) of the Convention. The convention also guarantees the principle of the freedom of movement for medical personnel and works for providing the facilitations required so they can carry out their duties, including the evacuation and transfer of the wounded, sick, pregnant or post-natal women and the needed vaccines for children. Article (21) of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention stipulates that: "Convoys of vehicles or hospital trains on land or specially provided vessels on sea, conveying wounded and sick civilians, the infirm and maternity cases, shall be respected and protected ... in the same manner as the hospitals provided for in Article 18" *Article (23) of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention ensures free consignment of medical supplies to needed by the civilians as the Article states: "Each High Contracting Party shall allow the free passage of all consignments of medical and hospital stores and objects necessary for religious worship intended only for civilians of another High Contracting Party, even if the latter is its adversary".*

Therefore, under the 1949 Geneva Convention and in light of the war circumstances, the Israeli occupation State is obliged to ensure continuous Palestinian civilian population's access to all the needs, including medicines, medical equipment, medical transports, medications, vaccines and other different medical disposables, in addition to the medical transports such as ambulances for transferring the wounded and sick whether they were sent by individuals, groups, states or humanitarian organizations, which ensure that those civilians enjoy the highest attainable standard of health.

The duty of the Israeli State has been identified more detailed relevant to food and medical supplies for the population in Article (55) of the *Fourth Geneva Convention*, which states that: "To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary foodstuffs, medical stores and other articles if the resources of the occupied territory are inadequate ..."

Conclusion

The Israeli forces continue to escalate their attacks against the medical personnel, paramedics, ambulances, field medical points and hospitals while carrying out their duties of evacuating and offering medical treatment for those wounded during the peaceful March of Return. It seems that those attacks are part of a policy adopted by the Israeli forces, aiming at intimidating and preventing the medical staffers from carrying out their humanitarian duties towards the killed and wounded in the Gaza Strip border areas.

The facts on the ground indicate that the Israeli forces' attacks against the Palestinian medical personnel were not unintentional, accident or individual acts. The repeated attacks against doctors, nurses and paramedics over the days of the March of Return confirm the fact that they have been deliberately targeted and bodily harmed by the Israeli forces in the clash fields.

The high number of casualties among the medical personnel working in the clashes fields and serious damage that ambulances sustained in addition to the repeated attacks against the field hospitals and medical points clearly prove the non-compliance of the occupying power with the rules of international humanitarian law.

PCHR condemns and denounces the Israeli attacks against the Palestinian medical personnel, ambulances, field medical points and hospitals designated for saving the March of Return casualties while carrying out their duty of evacuating and transferring the killed and treating the wounded in the Gaza Strip border area. Thus, PCHR

- Calls upon the international community, through the International Security Council, to take immediate and decisive actions in order to stop Israel's serious and grave violations against Palestinian civilians, including the Palestinian medical personnel in the Gaza Strip;
- Calls upon the ICRC to urgently intervene to take necessary measures to guarantee that the medical personnel freely work in the Gaza Strip and to provide them the protection required;
- Calls upon the World Health Organization (WHO) to practice pressure on the international community to end the grave violations practiced against the Palestinian medical personnel, transports and ambulances for transferring and treating the wounded and sick, medical centers and field hospitals designated for rescuing the March of Return casualties;
- Stresses that Israel shall be held accountable by investigating with it for committing crimes against those civilians, who participated in the peaceful Return March demonstrations and the attacks carried out against the medical personnel; and
- Calls upon the ICC Chief Prosecutor to open an official investigation into these crimes and to prosecute and hold accountable all of those involved in issuing decisions in the Israeli forces at the political and security levels and those who applied them.