



Dear Tánaiste,

If even one child is denied the basic human right to life; to shelter; to water and food, we should denounce it. If even one child undergoes an amputation without anaesthetic, we should be outraged. So how can we watch the hundreds of thousands of children of Gaza be subjected to the trauma of the man-made public health crisis currently unfolding without doing more than just offering words of support?

The ongoing failure to protect health care in Gaza has devastating implications for the health of the population, now and into the future. Compounding this, the lack of access to clean water, adequate nutrition, and safe shelter will have catastrophic effects on the health of the people of Gaza for years to come.

As of the 28th of January 2024, at least 26,422 Palestinians have been killed and 65,087 injured.¹ **This represents 1.2% and 3% of the total population, respectively.** An estimated 1.7 Million have been displaced, with over 60% of Gaza's housing reportedly damaged or destroyed.¹ **This means the displacement and lack of shelter will be protracted.** The entire population of Gaza is reported to be at levels of "crisis or worse" in terms of food insecurity, leaving **Gaza's 335,000 children under 5 especially vulnerable to malnutrition, increasing their risk of death from common illnesses.**² Due to these conditions, rates of infectious diseases such as gastroenteritis and upper respiratory infections have been soaring **and will, undoubtedly, increase the human toll at alarming rates in the coming months.**³ Only 14 of 36 hospitals are even partially functioning. So **less than half of the original health service's capacity is available to deal with an ever increasing burden of illness and injury.**¹

Prior to October 7, 2023, 80% of Gaza's population was reliant on humanitarian assistance.⁴ The need for assistance is much greater now. Hundreds of people are dying every day, and many more will die in the coming months because there is no adequate access to safe water, food, medicines and shelter in Gaza. These deaths are preventable. They must be prevented.

These statistics are harrowing. They should activate our ethical and moral compass and must incite action. While the solutions are inherently political, this is not about politics. In the face of such human suffering, there can only be one side - the side of humanity.

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Article 1, UN Declaration of Human rights.

We welcome our government's continued support of UNWRA at this critical time but more is needed to secure adequate funding of all key relief agencies working in Gaza and to ensure the immediate and safe access to meaningful humanitarian assistance for the people of Gaza.

We also welcome the recent International Court of Justice order restraining Israel from committing potentially genocidal acts. We urge our government and the international community to do more to urgently stop the ongoing destruction of people, health systems and other infrastructure in Gaza.

Irish Society of Specialists in Public Health Medicine.



References:

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