



## Joint Appeal

### ICHR and Civil Society Calls for Ending the Closure on Gaza and Taking Immediate Action to Save Lives amid COVID-19 Outbreak

The Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC), the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO), and the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) urge the international community to intervene and support the civilian population in the Gaza Strip as it faces a potential humanitarian catastrophe.

Two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are desperately combatting an unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak within the general population, amid Israel's incessant restrictive measures and a severely depleted healthcare system. Earlier in August, the Israeli authorities tightened its illegal, 14-year closure on Gaza by banning the entry of most goods via Kerem Shalom commercial crossing, including fuel, and decreasing the fishing zone from 15 to eight nautical miles, before completely banning fishing activities.

The most alarming repercussion of Israel's recent punitive policies is the severe shortage in power supply due to lack of sufficient fuel for the Gaza Electricity Distribution Corporation (GEDC) to run the Strip's sole power plant. The crisis not only compounds the suffering of Gaza's residents—who are provided with only four hours of power daily—but also hinders the provision of basic services across crucial sectors, such as water and sanitation. The chronic water shortage in residential buildings is expected to worsen, and raw sewage may be pumped into the sea, raising additional concerns about the population's health.

On 24 August 2020, the local authorities placed the Gaza Strip under a complete, 48-hour lockdown following the first positive COVID-19 cases to be detected within the general population. Field data indicates that the medical sector is severely underequipped to deal with a pandemic spreading throughout the population. Alarmingly, there are only 110 beds in Gaza's intensive care units (ICU), with 78 of them in public hospitals, seven in military clinics, 12 in non-profit medical institutions, and 13 in private hospitals. Critically, 72 percent of the ICU beds in public hospitals are currently occupied. Further, only 93 ventilators in all medical facilities combined are operable. The authorities might prioritize using the available resources to treat coronavirus cases, which would significantly undermine other patients' access to healthcare, unless the international community intervened.

Movement restrictions have been imposed, separating the five districts of the Gaza Strip. Although such measures proved effective in the early stages of the outbreak, they have exacerbated the dire socioeconomic conditions in Gaza, as breadwinners are confined to their homes, thus undermining the financial stability of more than half of Gaza's population and increasing the likelihood of reliance on food aid. It is estimated that more than half of the population in Gaza live in poverty, with almost 62.2 percent of families struggling to obtain food on a daily basis.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization have long warned of a looming humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip should Israel continue to impose its closure in deviation of international law. Israel's recent, additional collective punishment policies, as well as the alarming coronavirus outbreak, are set to aggravate this catastrophe.

We are encouraged by the remarkable efforts exerted by the Ministry of Health and all other governmental sectors to contain the viral outbreak despite the state of the under-resourced health sector, and call on all residents of Gaza to comply with the safety and preventive measures put in place. We also call on the competent authorities to mobilize support for those who have lost their jobs due to the lockdown.

We welcome the Palestinian Authority's plans to send a delegation to the Gaza Strip and highly appreciate the medical aid it has been providing. In this regard, we strongly urge the Palestinian Authority to fulfil its obligations towards the population in Gaza, including by putting an end to the "financial" retirement of Gaza's public servants.

We similarly call on the concerned agencies, NGOs and international bodies to mobilize support for residents of the Gaza Strip, to urgently ramp up supplies of medical equipment and ventilators, and to exert pressure on Israel, the occupying power, to immediately and unconditionally lift the blockade and closure.

**END**

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أنشئ، مجلس منظمات حقوق الإنسان الفلسطينية لتنسيق عمل مؤسسات حقوق الإنسان ذات الاهتمام والرؤية المشتركة، وتعزيز حقوق الإنسان وحرياته الأساسية ومبدأ سيادة القانون في الأرض الفلسطينية المحتلة.

The Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council was established to enable Palestinian human rights NGOs to act collectively to serve a common goal; promoting human rights and the role of law in the occupied Palestinian territory

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