

Palestine-Gaza: Our humanitarian and scientific responsibility

Filistin-Gazze: İnsani ve bilimsel sorumluluğumuz

Letter to Editor

According to the United Nations data, as of May 4, 2025, over 52.535 deaths, of which 70% are women and children, and 118.491 injuries have been reported as a result of Israel's recent attacks on the occupied Gaza Strip, but the actual numbers are believed to be even higher (1). Armed conflict is defined as a public health emergency that requires international cooperation and community health preparedness to effectively respond to the increasing health needs of the affected population. This is because armed conflicts lead to numerous issues that will affect not only those in the conflict zone but also future generations and people in other regions.

The recent Israeli attacks on Gaza have taken a drastically different course compared to historical wars. For example, health services and healthcare workers have been direct targets of Israeli attacks. The targeting of hospitals and the blockade of medical supplies have severely undermined emergency interventions and treatment possibilities. International health organizations such as the World Health Organization and the International Red Cross have been rendered unable to operate (2). The destruction of healthcare infrastructure has made vaccination, chronic disease management, and essential health services impossible (3,4). The entire population of Gaza, especially vulnerable groups such as women, the elderly, disabled individuals, and children, is unable to access healthcare services. It is estimated that the shortages in nutrition, healthcare, and medications have worsened the existing acute and chronic conditions of the population (2-4). Israel's attacks and obstruction of humanitarian aid are also adversely affecting basic health-related elements such as water supply, sanitation, and food. Pollution, the spread of harmful chemicals and toxins, malnutrition, and the rise in infectious diseases are all factors that are worsening the overall health condition of Gaza's population (1,2). The deliberate and planned destruction of buildings in Gaza and other regions of Palestine is depriving people of their right to healthy housing, which negatively affects their health. Furthermore, Palestinians have been repeatedly displaced, and the health problems resulting from this forced migration continue to escalate (5).

Israel's attacks have also had serious and lasting effects on the natural environment. Pollution and inadequate waste management have become critical issues in Gaza. It is estimated that the bombings have led to air, water, sea, and soil pollution due to the release of harmful waste such as heavy metals, chemicals, and explosives,

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which could lead to serious ecological imbalances not only in Gaza but also in the surrounding regions. The destruction of buildings and infrastructure has further contributed to the negative environmental impact. The attacks are also causing the destruction of natural habitats and the degradation of agricultural land. Moreover, the damage caused by explosives is leading to the loss of minerals and organic matter in the soil, which will have detrimental effects on agricultural production. The disruption of the ecosystem and the risk to local biodiversity are expected to worsen. Water resources in the region are among the most affected areas. The attacks have targeted water infrastructure, hindering the provision of safe and clean water. The spread of diseases due to contaminated water is threatening the health of civilians, with long-term adverse effects such as the spread of polio anticipated. Israel's

environmental damage in Gaza is likely to have long-term and potentially irreversible consequences. Organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have been ineffective in addressing these adverse impacts due to pressures from countries that support the occupation (1,2,4).

Torture, ill-treatment, and abuse of detainees and civilians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza have become routine violations of human rights and public health issues (5).

In conclusion, the health problems resulting from the prolonged blockade and periodic Israeli attacks on Gaza have worsened with the recent escalation, introducing new health challenges and having significant negative effects on both the physical and mental health of the Gaza population. The already struggling health-care system in Gaza has now reached the brink of col-



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lapse. Women, children, and new-borns, in particular, are facing severe health issues due to limited access to essential maternal, neonatal, and child health services. The bombing of healthcare facilities, the collapse of health services, shortages of medication and medical supplies, forced displacement, power and water cuts, and restrictions on food access pose serious threats to public health (1,2,4). Despite these grave human rights violations, war crimes, and public health and environmental crises, the scientific community has not given sufficient attention to the issue. Scientists, physicians, and public health professionals must bring this matter to the forefront and work toward ending and reversing the long-standing human rights violations and their adverse public and environmental health effects in occupied Gaza and Palestine. Additionally, this situation must be recognized by all international health organizations as a global public health emergency. It is the responsibility of scientists, researchers, and academic journals to address these critical issues.

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