



**Genocide in Gaza:**  
**The Systematic Targeting of  
the Health Sector**

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# Introduction

Since October 7, 2023, the Gaza Strip has been ravaged by an intensifying war of unprecedented brutality, with the Israeli occupation deliberately targeting the enclave's health system. The assault has led to the destruction of hospitals and medical centers, crippling Gaza's ability to provide essential health services and leaving its population vulnerable to further suffering.

The attacks on Gaza's health sector are not isolated incidents but part of a broader strategy aimed at inflicting a humanitarian disaster. Thousands of Palestinian civilians, already living in dire conditions, have been deprived of critical medical care. These strikes have claimed the lives of many medical professionals, and hundreds of thousands more have been left without access to life-saving treatment.

Despite these overwhelming challenges, Gaza's medical staff continues to operate in an environment of extreme danger. They work under unimaginable pressure, often with inadequate resources, to treat the wounded and the sick, striving to provide care amid the chaos. Their perseverance in these dire conditions only underscores the magnitude of the catastrophe unfolding.

The assault on Gaza's health system constitutes a dual crime against humanity. Not only does it flagrantly violate international humanitarian law, which unequivocally prohibits the targeting of medical facilities and personnel, but it also adds to the already grave toll on the civilian population. This report seeks to shed light on the extent of these violations, documenting the destruction of medical infrastructure, the targeting of healthcare workers, and the collapse of Gaza's health system in the face of an ongoing humanitarian crisis.

## Context of Attacks on Gaza's Health Sector

From the outset of the ongoing genocidal conflict, the occupation authorities have demonstrated a clear intent to target and cripple Gaza's health sector. This strategy became evident as early as October 14, 2023—just one week after the aggression began—when the Israeli military ordered the evacuation of 22 hospitals in the northern Gaza Strip. On the same day, Israeli airstrikes struck the Cancer Diagnostic Center at Al-Ahli Hospital, wounding four staff members, signaling a troubling escalation of hostilities aimed directly at medical facilities.

In the following days, hospital directors in northern Gaza—including those at Al-Shifa, Al-Ahli, and Al-Awda—were subjected to relentless pressure. Repeated calls from Israeli military officials threatened to bomb these hospitals if they were not evacuated. Despite the immense risks, Gaza's medical staff stood firm. They collectively refused to abandon their posts, underscoring that hospitals are critical institutions that cannot be deserted, especially during a humanitarian crisis of this magnitude.





The targeted assault on Gaza's health infrastructure is part of a broader strategy to create a humanitarian disaster. By deliberately undermining healthcare services, the occupying forces are ensuring that, even if the fighting ceases, the effects of the conflict will continue.

Hundreds of thousands of injured and ill people will be left without medical care, a condition that will only worsen their suffering and put their lives in grave jeopardy.

Moreover, the systematic destruction of the health sector has been used as a tool of forced displacement.



In the northern Gaza Strip, the collapse of healthcare facilities contributed significantly to the mass displacement of civilians. This disruption not only jeopardizes lives in the immediate term but ensures that, long after the war's conclusion, the people of Gaza will continue to bear the devastating consequences of these deliberate attacks on their healthcare system.

Since the eruption of Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023, humanitarian organizations and international bodies have repeatedly sounded the alarm about the impending collapse of Gaza's healthcare system. With each passing day, the ability of hospitals and clinics to function—let alone save lives—has diminished, leaving the population vulnerable in an already dire situation. In response, Israeli authorities have attempted to justify their systematic attacks on health facilities, medical staff, paramedics,



and even patients—many of whom sought refuge in hospitals, believing them to be sanctuaries from the violence.

As the conflict drags on into 2025, the international community’s concern has intensified. Calls for urgent action have been made, including a session of the United Nations Security Council to address the dire state of Gaza’s health sector. Hospitals, many of which have been partially destroyed, are currently operating at a fraction of their capacity, with just 1,822 beds available to care for the hundreds of thousands of wounded civilians. At the same time, an additional population of patients—many requiring advanced or long-term medical treatment—remains in desperate need of care.

This critical discussion was brought to the forefront following the tragic destruction of Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza. The hospital was bombed, set on fire, and ultimately reduced to rubble. This attack is part of a larger, deeply concerning pattern of violence aimed directly at Gaza’s health infrastructure. Since the beginning of the assault, Israel’s military has employed a variety of brutal tactics, including bombing hospitals, besieging medical centres, blocking the delivery of fuel and essential medical supplies, and demolishing health clinics.

The impact of these attacks is staggering. According to recent data, the following health institutions have been either destroyed or rendered non-functional:

Health institutions	Number
Hospitals completely destroyed or out of service	34
Health centers destroyed	80
Other health institutions (including clinics) destroyed	162
Ambulances destroyed	139
Hospitals partially destroyed or out of service	17

These figures underscore the deliberate and systematic nature of the attacks on Gaza’s health sector, which is not only hindering the immediate response to casualties but also contributing to a long-term public health crisis. The situation is increasingly dire, with

hospitals overwhelmed, staff stretched to the breaking point, and resources rapidly depleting.

By October 2024, as the first anniversary of the ongoing genocide approached, an update from the Palestinian Ministry of Health painted a grim picture of Gaza's health sector. Approximately 65% of the region's healthcare institutions—spanning government-run, civil, private, and UNRWA facilities—had been directly targeted. The remaining medical centres were struggling to operate, many running at more than three times their usual capacity, with intensive care units and neonatal wards under particular strain.

The severe damage to hospitals and clinics has left Gaza's healthcare system overwhelmed and on the brink of collapse. With critical resources stretched thin, medical professionals continue to face the impossible task of providing care under increasingly dire conditions, as the already fragile infrastructure is pushed beyond its limits. The situation underscores the devastating impact of the ongoing conflict, which has not only decimated vital health services but also exacerbated the suffering of those in desperate need of medical attention.



## Deliberate Targeting of Medical Personnel in Gaza

Throughout the ongoing conflict in Gaza, the Israeli military has systematically targeted medical personnel, violating international laws and norms that protect healthcare workers in times of war. These attacks have taken many forms, including assassinations, arbitrary arrests, and enforced disappearances. The scale and nature of these assaults highlight a clear and disturbing pattern of violence aimed at those providing critical medical care during the crisis.

The numbers are staggering. As of July 31, 2024, Palestinian sources have documented a total of 1,068 instances of medical personnel being killed, arrested, or disappeared. Among these victims, doctors and other healthcare workers have been particularly targeted.

### Types of Attacks and Number of Victims:

Assassinations and murders	1,068 victims, including doctors and other healthcare workers
Arrests and enforced disappearances	331 victims
Executions within prisons	3 victims





Further breaking down the toll, the data reveals the following numbers from October 07, 2023 to July 31, 2024;

Nephrologist	1
Pediatric surgeon	1
Diagnostic radiologist:	1
Emergency medicine specialist	1
Hematology consultant	1
Plastic surgeon	1
Orthopedic surgeon	1
Cardiologist	2
ENT specialist (Ear, Nose, and Throat)	2
Pathologist	2
Anesthesia and resuscitation specialist	3
Internal medicine and gastroenterology specialist	4
Obstetrician and gynecologist	5
Pediatrician	6
Dentist:	50
General practitioner	65

This data underscores the devastating impact of the violence on Gaza’s medical community. By July 31, 2024, at least 146 doctors from various specialties had been killed, a significant portion of the total number of casualties among healthcare workers. Notably, Palestinian officials have pointed to a pattern of targeted assassinations, particularly of doctors with rare specialties. Of the 30 such doctors, many were specifically targeted in what appeared to be a coordinated and intentional strategy to decimate Gaza’s medical capacity.



Raafat Al-Majdalawi, Director General of the Health and Community Return Association in Gaza, confirmed that these attacks were not random, but rather part of a systematic campaign to cripple Gaza's healthcare system. The killing of doctors, including those in critical fields, has only compounded the already overwhelming challenges faced by medical professionals on the ground. With healthcare facilities severely damaged and staff under constant threat, the ability to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza has been severely compromised.

The ongoing assault on Gaza's healthcare system has not only decimated medical infrastructure but also led to the direct targeting of healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses, and technicians. One of the most alarming reports came in February 2024, when a doctor revealed that approximately 70 healthcare professionals were being held as prisoners. These individuals, including doctors, nurses, and medical technicians, were detained by Israeli forces, though the authorities have not disclosed their whereabouts or the locations of their detention camps. This estimate pertains specifically to Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, offering a glimpse into the broader scale of the crisis affecting healthcare workers throughout the region.

Medical personnel have faced numerous atrocities at the hands of the Israeli military. These have ranged from violent attacks within hospitals to threats against patients and ambulance crews. In many documented instances, healthcare workers were deliberately targeted in acts of terror, including physical assaults and harassment. Inside detention facilities, the situation has been even worse, with reports of severe torture. Medical staff have been subjected to brutal beatings, forced into painful positions, and deprived of medical care. Many have also experienced prolonged periods of being tied up, blindfolded, or subjected to humiliation. Tragically, some have reported sexual assaults, including rape, at the hands of soldiers.

The impact of these crimes has been catastrophic for Gaza's medical community.

The disruption of the health system has made it nearly impossible for doctors, nurses, and administrators to perform their duties effectively. One of the most significant challenges has been the difficulty in reaching hospitals from their homes, as many medical professionals are forced to navigate ongoing attacks and obstacles in their daily commute. Additionally, repeated displacement due to the bombing and targeting of medical facilities has left healthcare workers without any semblance of safety or security.

The strain on healthcare personnel extends beyond the physical dangers they face. Many are also dealing with the emotional and social toll of displacement. As their families are forced to relocate repeatedly, healthcare workers are under intense pressure to balance their professional responsibilities with their personal struggles. The lack of financial resources exacerbates the situation, leaving many medical professionals struggling to meet their basic needs while simultaneously attempting to provide urgent medical care in an environment of extreme scarcity.

In this environment of constant threat, Gaza's medical staff continue to demonstrate immense resilience and dedication. However, the toll of these targeted attacks, combined with the breakdown of basic infrastructure and services, threatens to further destabilize the health system, leaving the population more vulnerable than ever.



The toll on Gaza's medical workforce has been devastating, with the assassination of 146 doctors documented by official sources—representing approximately 2.4% of the total registered doctors in the enclave as of 2021. These losses have not only taken a personal and emotional toll on families and communities but have also further crippled the already strained healthcare system. The doctors killed account for around 8% of Gaza's clinical capacity, significantly amplifying the challenges in delivering essential medical care during an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

In the face of such overwhelming loss, medical teams continue to operate under extraordinary conditions, often providing life-saving services in non-medical spaces such as alleys, hallways, and makeshift treatment areas. Hospitals and clinics are operating far beyond capacity, with medical professionals working tirelessly despite severe fatigue and stress. The loss of specialized medical personnel has been particularly acute, exacerbated by the ongoing displacement—both internal and external—along with the arrests and murder of many highly trained healthcare workers. This shortage has made it even more difficult to provide quality care, further deepening the crisis.



Since the outbreak of the genocidal war, there have been numerous reports from activists and healthcare workers documenting the systematic targeting of Palestinian doctors and their families. These attacks appear to be part of a premeditated effort to eliminate key

figures in Gaza's medical sector. Several well-known doctors have been assassinated, including Dr. Saed Darabieh, Dr. Omar Farwana and his daughter, Dr. Aya Farwana, Dr. Salah Zanoun, and Dr. Medhat Saidam, all of whom were killed alongside their family members. The targeted nature of these assassinations was further underscored by airstrikes on the homes of medical professionals, aimed explicitly at eliminating these vital figures in Gaza's healthcare system.

Additionally, the ongoing crimes of arrest and enforced disappearance have further depleted the ranks of Gaza's medical community. Many doctors remain unaccounted for, their whereabouts unknown as the Israeli military continues its systematic campaign against medical personnel. The full extent of these losses has yet to be fully documented, as the ongoing genocide has paralyzed the ability of officials to compile accurate records, leaving many victims and their families in limbo.

These deliberate and systematic attacks on doctors, healthcare workers, and health facilities are intended to exacerbate the suffering of the Palestinian population, making it increasingly difficult for survivors to access the medical care they so desperately need. As the war continues, the likelihood of further losses remains high, threatening to push Gaza's already overwhelmed healthcare system beyond the point of no return.

## **Targeting of Doctors in Gaza: A Harrowing Account of Atrocities**

This section highlights some of the most egregious violations committed against doctors crimes that amount to gross human rights abuses and serious violations of international law.

One of the most shocking cases involves Dr. Adnan Al-Barsh, an orthopedic surgeon, who was arrested by Israeli forces in April 2024 while performing his duties in northern Gaza. Dr. Al-Barsh was subjected to sexual assault before being assassinated. His death occurred



in Ofer Prison, located in the West Bank, after he had been taken into custody during the course of his medical work. This brutal act is just one example of the violence that has been deliberately directed at healthcare workers in Gaza.

Dr. Ziad Al-Dalu, a specialist in internal medicine at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, was another medical professional who met a tragic fate. On March 18, 2024, Dr. Al-Dalu and several of his colleagues were arrested while working at the hospital, which had been under attack by Israeli forces. His death inside an Israeli prison marked another grim chapter in the targeting of Gaza's healthcare professionals.



In November 2023, Dr. Iyad al-Rantisi, the head of the gynecology and obstetrics department at Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahia, was arrested by Israeli forces as he attempted to relocate from northern Gaza to the south. The military was pressuring civilians to move as part of a broader strategy to force displacement. Six days after his arrest, Dr. al-Rantisi died from torture in an Israeli interrogation facility in Ashkelon.

The authorities did not immediately announce his death, and a court in Ashkelon imposed a six-month gag order on the publication of the details, which only lifted in May 2024.

Another doctor whose fate remains uncertain is Dr. Hussam Abu Safia, the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital. Arrested by Israeli forces, Dr. Abu Safia has reportedly been subjected to severe torture during his detention at the "Sde Teiman" camp.

Sources indicate that his life is at great risk, with growing concerns over the possibility of his execution or death under torture, following the pattern of targeted killings that have been inflicted upon numerous doctors and medical staff since the conflict began on October 7, 2023.

## **The Devastating Impact of Israeli Targeting of Gaza's Health System**

The Israeli attacks, aimed at exacerbating the humanitarian crisis, have had far-reaching implications for the delivery of medical care and the overall health system in the Gaza Strip. The assault has not only resulted in widespread destruction but also intentionally targeted specialized medical professionals through assassinations and arrests, further deepening the medical emergency.

Doctors and healthcare workers in Gaza face daily threats, from direct attacks—such as bombings and arrests—to the indirect effects of the increasingly volatile security situation. The strain on Gaza's medical staff has reached catastrophic levels, as the loss of many skilled professionals and the forced displacement of others have created critical shortages in medical specialties. These conditions have compounded the already dire healthcare crisis, making it almost impossible for the remaining medical staff to meet the overwhelming needs of the population.

The deliberate targeting and exhaustion of medical personnel form part of a larger strategy to dismantle Gaza's health system. A study conducted by Harvard University, which analyzed satellite imagery of the region, revealed that the damage to healthcare facilities was not random. The concentration of attacks on medical infrastructure—with a probability of less than 1% of occurring by chance—points to a clear intention behind these strikes. The report also raised alarm over the breach of international humanitarian law, as these

targeted attacks undermine essential health services that are critical for the survival of the civilian population.

While international institutions have made significant efforts to provide support, a glaring disparity exists in the protection offered to foreign workers compared to local medical staff. International personnel often benefit from some level of security, while local healthcare workers face daily risks without any meaningful protection. This lack of safety has further endangered the already overstretched medical workforce in Gaza.

The consequences of these attacks have been devastating. By early 2025, Gaza's health system had deteriorated by at least 80%, rendering it incapable of meeting even the most basic medical needs. Hospitals are overwhelmed, and many injured people have tragically lost their lives due to the inability of medical teams to respond in a timely manner. The destruction of critical health facilities has left thousands of patients, especially those with chronic conditions, without the care they urgently need. Cardiac catheterization centers, dialysis units, cancer treatment facilities, and neurosurgery departments have all been severely disrupted, putting the lives of thousands at risk.

The shortage of medical resources has further compounded the situation. With a population of 2.1 million people in Gaza, the healthcare system operates with only 1,822 hospital beds—meaning there are fewer than 0.1 beds for every 100 people. In addition, each doctor in Gaza is responsible for treating approximately 347 individuals, placing immense pressure on healthcare workers. The lack of sufficient medical staff and infrastructure has led to overcrowding in hospitals, making it impossible for facilities to handle the influx of injured patients.

This overcrowding, coupled with the displacement of tens of thousands of citizens seeking refuge in hospitals, has created an untenable working environment for medical staff. Doctors and nurses have been forced to treat patients in hallways, alleys, and makeshift treatment areas, far from the sterile environments of operating rooms and proper medical

facilities. These dire conditions have placed even greater strain on an already crumbling health system, further complicating efforts to provide life-saving care.

In conclusion, the deliberate and systematic targeting of Gaza's health sector has had profound and devastating effects. The destruction of medical infrastructure, the loss of skilled professionals, and the severe shortage of medical resources have pushed the health system to the brink of collapse. The human cost is immeasurable, with countless lives lost and many others left without the care they need to survive. As the violence continues, the people of Gaza face an escalating health crisis with no clear end in sight.





## Findings and Recommendations

### Findings

- **Complete Collapse of Gaza's Health Sector:** The systematic targeting of hospitals and health centres has resulted in the near-total collapse of the health system in Gaza. By October 2024, around 65% of health facilities had been damaged or destroyed, forcing the remaining infrastructure to operate far beyond its capacity, leading to severe overcrowding.
- **Direct Attacks on Medical Personnel:** Doctors and healthcare workers have been deliberately targeted through killings, arrests, and forced disappearances. These actions have caused the loss of numerous medical professionals and exacerbated the shortage of essential specialists, further crippling the health system's ability to deliver even basic care.
- **Disruption of Specialized Medical Services:** The destruction of specialized health centres, including those for cardiac care, kidney dialysis, and other vital services, has placed countless lives at risk. Many patients requiring these services can no longer access the treatment they urgently need.
- **Weakening of Health Infrastructure:** Widespread damage to health facilities, combined with ongoing pressure on medical personnel, has left the health system in a state of collapse. Healthcare workers are forced to operate in makeshift spaces—such as hospital corridors and alleyways—far from the sterile conditions necessary for medical treatment, making it increasingly difficult to provide adequate care.

- **Urgent International Intervention:** The international community must take immediate and concrete action to protect medical personnel and health facilities. This includes the imposition of special protection for hospitals and clinics, as well as ensuring the uninterrupted delivery of essential medical supplies and humanitarian aid.
- **Accountability for Crimes Against Medical Workers:** International legal action must be taken against the Israeli occupation authorities responsible for targeting doctors and medical staff. Filing cases in international courts will ensure legal accountability and help document the atrocities committed, providing a pathway for justice.
- **Continued Humanitarian Support for Gaza's Health Sector:** Ongoing humanitarian support is crucial to sustain the health sector in Gaza. This includes the delivery of medical supplies, emergency equipment, and technical assistance to help rebuild the infrastructure and ensure that health services can continue to operate under dire circumstances.
- **Global Awareness Campaigns:** International campaigns should be intensified to pressure Israeli authorities to cease the targeting of medical staff and health facilities. There is also a pressing need to raise global awareness of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, urging the United Nations and other international bodies to take urgent action to protect civilians and healthcare workers.
- **Rebuilding Gaza's Health System:** A comprehensive, long-term plan must be developed to rebuild Gaza's health infrastructure. This includes reconstructing hospitals and health centres, providing specialized training for medical personnel, and increasing investments in healthcare to ensure a robust and effective system for the future.
- **Psychological and Professional Support for Medical Personnel:** Medical workers who have faced extreme stress and trauma during the conflict require immediate psychological support and specialized training. Providing resources to help them cope

with the pressures of their work and healing from the trauma they have endured is essential to restore a functioning health workforce.

- **Independent Investigations and Documentation of Violations:** Independent investigations into violations of international law must be conducted to document crimes against civilians and healthcare workers. Holding those responsible accountable is crucial for achieving justice and preventing future violations.
- **Strengthening Regional and International Collaboration:** It is critical to strengthen cooperation between international and local humanitarian organizations and regional health authorities. By working together, these entities can provide the immediate assistance needed to rebuild Gaza's health sector and ensure that aid reaches those who need it most.





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