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## **Statement - Israel/OPT: Israel must cease targeting human rights defenders in the healthcare sector in the Gaza Strip**

Front Line Defenders expresses its deep concern regarding the alarming and escalating trend of targeting human rights defenders in the healthcare sector in Gaza Strip, Occupied Palestinian Territory. Since 7 October 2023, human rights defenders on the front lines working for the right to healthcare for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have faced repeated attacks by Israeli military forces. These human rights defenders, who risk their lives to rescue wounded civilians, have themselves been killed and injured, threatened, forcibly disappeared, interrogated, and ill-treated.

The situation at Al Awda Hospital in Jabalia, Northern Gaza, which forms part of the non-governmental organization Al Awda Health and Community Association (AWDA), has become increasingly dire. On 13 October 2023, human rights defender [Ahmed Muhanna](#), the head of Al Awda Hospital, received a message from Israeli military forces ordering him to evacuate the hospital within 2 hours. Despite continued calls and intimidation since then, Ahmed Muhanna and his team refused to abandon patients, risking their lives by staying in the hospital to provide crucial healthcare to patients who could not be evacuated.

On 21 November 2023, the [deliberate shelling](#) of the hospital's third and fourth floors tragically killed three human rights defenders and healthcare workers, [Zeyad Tatari](#), [Mahmoud Abu Nujaila](#), and [Ahmad Al Sahar](#), and injured many others. Human rights defenders inside Al Awda Hospital also reported that Israeli military forces targeted crucial hospital facilities, including a surgery room, a medicine storage facility, and nine ambulances.

Since 5 December 2023, the hospital has been under severe siege, with Israeli tanks and snipers preventing anyone from entering or leaving the building. Snipers have reportedly targeted staff members, resulting in casualties, namely one nurse. Human rights defenders reported that at least one Israeli military sniper is located inside one of the hospital's buildings. On 21 December 2023, Israeli military forces opened fire on Al Awda Hospital's building, where healthcare workers, staff members, and patients are all trapped. This incident resulted in the tragic death of a staff member,

[On 17 December 2023](#), Israeli soldiers raided Al Awda Hospital, unlawfully detaining and forcibly disappearing human rights defender Ahmed Muhanna along with 21 others, who were then subjected to interrogation and ill-treatment. Before Ahmed Muhanna's detention, the human rights defender's colleagues reported that lasers from snipers would occasionally be aimed at Ahmed Muhanna in order to intimidate him.

While the human rights defender Ahmed Muhanna was in an unknown location, those initially detained, bound, and stripped were released after hours of interrogation. On 18 December 2023, Israeli military forces returned with detained Ahmed Muhanna and proceeded to unlawfully detaining 11 others, including 5 staff members. As of now, Ahmed Muhanna remains in incommunicado detention.

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Inside the besieged hospital, human rights defenders, staff, and patients face severe shortages of food, water, electricity, and medication. Movement within the hospital is forbidden, hindering efforts to maintain essential services. Al Awda, one of the last functioning hospitals in the North Gaza Strip, has almost exhausted its last resources. It lacks oxygen for patients and has a scarce amount of fuel left for one small generator. Despite the critical situation, healthcare workers are determined to provide essential services.

Al Awda Hospital is not alone in its struggle. Rather, all hospitals in the Northern Gaza Strip face a repeated, widespread, and [systematic pattern](#) of intimidation, targeting, siege, and occupation by Israeli military forces. Human rights defenders have reported similar violations in hospitals like Al Shifa, [described by the World Health Organization's officials](#) as a "complete horror scene." Healthcare workers have been injured, detained, interrogated, and ill-treated in these hospitals too, while some hospitals have been [partially destroyed](#) or [forced out of service](#).

On 11 November 2023, human rights defender and healthcare worker [Hamman Alloh](#) was killed, along with some of his family members, by an Israeli airstrike on his home when he briefly left the Al Shifa Hospital to check on his family. Despite instructions urging people to evacuate to the south of the Gaza Strip, Hamman Alloh adamantly refused to leave his patients behind.

Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) [reported](#) that the number of healthcare workers killed in the ten weeks since 7 October 2023 in the Gaza Strip has exceeded the total number killed in all countries in the conflict globally in any single year since 2016. The report states that at least 300 healthcare workers have been reportedly killed.

Tlaleng Mofokeng, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health, [recently stated](#) that "the practice of medicine is under attack," adding "As a practicing medical doctor, I cannot fathom what my Gazan colleagues are enduring. They are working while their colleagues and loved ones are under attack. Many have been killed while treating their patients." She further emphasized: "We bear witness to a shameful war on healthcare workers," pointing to an "immeasurable" number of violations of the special protection afforded to civilians, children, and medical personnel under international humanitarian law, alongside widespread violations of international human rights law.

Front Line Defenders joins human rights defenders in urging the Israeli authorities to immediately cease targeting human rights defenders, including healthcare workers and calls for a swift and independent investigation into the serious, systematic, and widespread Israeli attacks on human rights defenders and healthcare workers since 7 October 2023. Front Line Defenders once again calls for the immediate release of healthcare worker Ahmed Muhanna and other forcibly disappeared human rights defenders. Furthermore, [we reiterate our urgent call](#) for an immediate and lasting ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law.