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רופאים אֲطִיבָא
לְזִכּוּיּוֹת אָדָם לְחֻקּוֹת הָאִינְסָאן

POSITION PAPER

THE HARMING OF MEDICAL PERSONNEL AND FACILITIES

DURING THE OCTOBER 7, 2023 HAMAS ATTACKS

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Introduction

One prominent aspect of the attacks carried out by Hamas on October 7, 2023, was the assault on medical personnel and facilities, during which emergency teams were prevented from reaching the wounded, while some of those attempting to provide care were killed. The evidence available to us through media reports and other public sources indicates that these actions must be investigated as war crimes.

Given that the armed conflict inside the Gaza Strip is still ongoing, any attacks on medical personnel and facilities and attempts to prevent them from carrying out their duties within this context remain outside the scope of this report - and will be addressed separately. Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) is currently engaged in protecting health workers and patients in Gaza and does not have immediate access or resources to collect testimonies and carry out adequate inquiries. Therefore, the subject of this report is limited to outlining the violations committed by Hamas on October 7, 2023. In doing so, we separately address attacks on hospitals and clinics and attacks on emergency medical personnel and vehicles.

Various testimonies indicate that civilians with paramedical and first-aid training who attempted to assist the wounded were also shot and murdered. In contrast to the cases outlined in this report, they were not identifiable as emergency care workers. However, their dedication to saving lives while risking their own must nonetheless be acknowledged, and the crimes of those who knowingly murdered them must not be diminished.

Note: The evidence included in this report has been collected from various media outlets and publicly available information sources and quoted verbatim.

Background: The Protection of Medical Establishments

The protection of medical establishments is anchored in international humanitarian law and World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines.

The Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War:

Article 18: "Civilian hospitals organized to give care to the wounded and sick, the infirm and maternity cases, may in no circumstances be the object of attack, but shall at all times be respected and protected by the Parties to the conflict."

The World Health Organization:

The WHO addresses the topic of conduct during armed conflict in regard to the protection of the sick and the wounded. The organization emphasizes that every person – whether engaged in combat or a civilian – is entitled to medical care and that any prioritization must be based solely on medical urgency. For this reason, medical and emergency personnel must receive special protection to carry out their work without obstruction and even receive assistance in carrying out their mission¹.

The United Nations Security Council:

In recent decades, armed forces involved in conflict situations have been documented as severely violating their obligation to protect medical personnel. This has led to the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2286². This resolution could have far-reaching consequences, as the Security Council not only condemns such attacks and demands adherence to international humanitarian law during times of armed conflict but also requires member states to proactively prevent and assume accountability for any attack on medical personnel.³

¹ [WMA Statement in Times of Armed Conflict and other Situations of Violence.](#)

² [Security Council Resolution 2286 \(2016\)](#)

³ [The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition](#)

Harming Emergency Medical Personnel and Vehicles

Awad Darawshe, a paramedic and ambulance driver, was murdered at the musical festival near Kibbutz Re'im. 23-year-old Darawshe arrived at the event while on duty as a United Hatzalah paramedic and ambulance driver. When the scale of the massacre and risks grew more apparent, the head of the emergency team ordered the medics to evacuate the premises. Darawshe refused to leave and remained on site to treat the wounded. **He was shot dead while attending to one of the injured.**⁴ His cousin, Muhammad Darawshe, recounted the information he received from colleagues who survived the events: "He said two things: "Go, I think I'll be fine," and "I still have bandages left to use."" Muhammad further noted: "He naively thought that the fact that he speaks Arabic would help him – it didn't. He didn't even have an opportunity to speak to anyone. They saw him being shot from 50-70 meters away; they were already escaping. They looked back and saw him being shot twice - once in the heart and once in the liver."⁵

Aharon Chaimov, a senior Magen David Adom paramedic and ambulance driver, was killed on his way to treat the wounded in Ofakim. 25-year-old Chaimov, himself a resident of Ofakim, was shot during the October 7 attacks while inside a Magen David Adom emergency vehicle.⁶

Dr. Tarek Abu Arar was injured while attending to a person he thought was wounded. Dr. Abu Arar volunteered as a physician with United Hatzalah. On Saturday morning, Dr. Abu Arar left his home in Ara'ara in the Negev for a shift at Barzilai Medical Center's emergency department. While driving through an intersection near the city of Sderot, he noticed a man who appeared to be wounded, lying on the side of the road. As Dr. Abu Arar described: "In those early hours, there were still no reports of terrorist infiltrations. Twenty minutes earlier, there had been a rocket

⁴ Muhammad Darawshe. "The Arab minority is demonstrating responsibility. What about the responsibility of the Jewish majority?" 23.10.2023, mekomit.co.il [Hebrew].

⁵ [Interview with Muhammad Darawshe](#), DemocraTV [Hebrew].

⁶ [Magen David Adom website](#), 8.10.2023 [Hebrew].

alert, so I decided to wear the medical vest I had received from United Hatzalah. When I saw the wounded person on the side of the road, I naturally stopped to help him... He appeared at first to be a soldier. When I stood about 50 meters away, he signaled to come closer, and I walked toward him... He shot me in the chest; I started shouting and praying; I was certain I was about to die. Then, I heard someone yell, "Stop! He's Arab". That's when I realized they were Hamas terrorists."

"They pinned me to a pole in the center of the junction, in the middle of the road, and told me, "We have a hostage now; the Israeli military can't kill us from the air." Then, they started shooting at every car that drove by, and unfortunately, they made sure they killed anyone in their way. It was horrifying, and it went on for two hours. When Israeli forces arrived, a shootout transpired between the terrorists and the soldiers, and the terrorists were using me as a human shield. One of the terrorists shot my leg and signaled that the next bullet would be to my head. I was severely bleeding. The entire time, I kept praying for a miracle. I was certain I was going to die."

Chananel Jarafi, an on-call paramedic, was injured while driving a Magen David Adom ambulance on his way to treat the wounded. As Jarafi recounted, he was woken up on the morning of October 7 by the sound of rocket barrages and alarms. "I immediately put on my medical uniform because I knew I would be called in as an on-call paramedic with an ambulance parked outside my home. A neighbor asked me to call him once I got called in, which happened a few minutes later. We were sent to Nir Am Junction on Road 35. About 500 meters before the junction, two Toyota vehicles loaded with terrorists drove by me... They stood on boxes, wearing headbands and armed with Kalashnikovs. Eliasaf Bar Chaim, who sat next to me, realized what was happening and told me to speed up because they were terrorists. When we were a few dozen meters away from them, they drove close to us and fired at the ambulance. I was hit in the back and was able to keep driving a

⁷ Meital Yasur Beit-Or, "[Muslim physician held hostage for hours: "I was shot in the chest, I thought I would die,"](#)" Israel Hayom, 12.10.2023 [Hebrew].

couple of dozen kilometers further into the city- which turned out to be a good decision, given that the entire road was full of terrorists.”⁸

Danny Starkman, the Magen David Adom Station Director in Ofakim, was taking care of a patient who was shot inside an ambulance. As Starkman described, the ambulance was being shot at, and one of the bullets hit the driver: “On Saturday, October 7, I arrived for a morning shift. As early as 7 am, we were sent to treat five people who were shot near Orim Junction. When we left Ofakim, a person with a gunshot wound in his arm was brought to us. I got him into the ambulance, and we began to treat him, but rather than go directly to the hospital, I continued toward Orim Junction to treat the five gunshot victims. When we approached the junction, we began to hear shooting. I was sitting in the back; the ambulance was hit.”

“At first, no one realized what had happened. We didn’t understand that these were terrorists. Even when the driver was shot, he thought it was soldiers who had accidentally shot at us... I ordered everyone to keep their heads down. I didn’t know what to do – whether to treat the driver, locate the terrorists, or report the incident. But then I noticed they were driving away from us, so I began to treat our driver.”⁹

Harming Magen David Adom ambulances: According to an MDA statement, “On the first day of the Swords of Iron War, when Hamas began its attack on the Gaza Envelope towns, terrorists also shot at the exterior, wheels, and windows of a Magen David Adom ambulance in Kissufim. The terrorists did so to neutralize the ambulance and prevent paramedics from treating and evacuating the wounded to a hospital.”¹⁰ In addition, MDA presented a video showing incinerated ambulances.¹¹

In the same statement, MDA also reported that nine ambulances had been put out of use following the October 7 attacks due to gunshot and fire damage. In addition, three MDA employees were murdered, and

⁸ Taken from his [testimony as given in an interview with Channel 14](#) [Hebrew].

⁹ Michal Koren Kariv, “[For the first time, MDA ambulances were intentionally harmed](#),” mako, 31.10.2023 [Hebrew].

¹⁰ [MDA website](#), 29.10.2023. [Hebrew].

¹¹ MDA Twitter (X) account, https://twitter.com/mda_israel/status/1720887083873546570?s=20

four volunteers remain injured.¹² The statement did not clarify who was murdered or injured on duty and who as civilians.

Attacks on Medical facilities and personnel

Be’eri Emergency Clinic: At the time of the attack, three staff members were present in the clinic, which usually serves as a dental clinic – Amit Mann, an on-call paramedic who was called into the kibbutz from Netivot; Nirit Hohnwald-Kornfeld, the kibbutz’s nurse, and Dr. Daniel Levy, a resident physician at Soroka Medical Center’s ENT Department, who was called in after three wounded persons arrived at the clinic.

Kibbutz nurse Nirit Hohnwald-Kornfeld was the only one of the three to survive the attack. In an interview with Channel 12, she said that terrorists arrived at the dental clinic in Be’eri, which was being used as an emergency clinic. Shachar Zemach and Amit Hadad, two community security squad volunteers, guarded the clinic door and shot at any terrorists attempting to come near. “Around 2 pm, we realized we wouldn’t make it out alive after Shachar and Amit ran out of ammunition, and we had no security room to hide in. Each of us found a corner to hide in. The terrorists entered and began firing at us and throwing many hand grenades. It was awful, just awful. I was sure I was going to die. They fired endless bullets and threw so many grenades, and we could hear them yelling Allah Akbar and laughing.” The assault continued for two hours until the Israeli military arrived at 4 pm. Hohnwald-Kornfeld and one wounded person were the only ones to make it out of the clinic alive.¹³

In photos taken by Amit Mann from inside the clinic,¹⁴ **large amounts of blood can be seen across the floor beside a red first aid bag and open medical equipment, as well as Amit herself, wearing gloves.** The images demonstrate that the dental clinic was being used as a field clinic for the many wounded in the attack. Photographer Ziv Koren shot additional photos from inside the clinic, which showed severe

¹² Kariv.

¹³ [Uvda](#), Channel 12 [Hebrew].

¹⁴ ["The heroism of Amit Mann, an MDA paramedic from Be’eri,"](#) Kan 11 [Hebrew].

damage to medical equipment.¹⁵ Another patient being treated by Dr. Levy was able to escape the attack after exiting the clinic through a window.¹⁶ Additionally, a kibbutz resident stated that he was treated that day by Amit Mann and that he was released before the attack on the clinic began.¹⁷

Barzilai Medical Center: Since the start of the war, Ashkelon's Barzilai Medical Center sustained three direct rocket hits. On October 8, the second day of the war, a rocket hit the hospital's gynecological and high-risk pregnancy units. The patients and staff had already been evacuated to safer locations, which saved their lives. On October 12, the sixth day of the war, a rocket directly hit the pediatric unit and caused severe damage to the structure. Although no children were present in the unit while the building was struck, as most patients had already been evacuated to the underground levels of the hospital, the head of the unit had to be rescued from the secure room which was covered in concrete and glass fragments. A few days later, a third rocket hit the entrance to the administration building.¹⁸

Conclusion

The protection of medical facilities and personnel is fundamental to ensuring that even when humanity escalates into armed conflict, minimum human rights protections and rules are still respected. However, the reports and testimonies that appeared in various media outlets and social media indicate that most of the attacks mentioned above (except for Barzilai Hospital, which was hit as part of an indiscriminate shelling of rockets towards a civilian area in which the hospital is located) intentionally targeted medical personnel who were marked as such and who were operating within distinctly medical environments.

¹⁵ [Facebook post](#) by Ziv Koren, 29.10.2023.

¹⁶ Uvda.

¹⁷ Kan 11.

¹⁸ Ido Efrati, "Direct hits and partial protection: How the hospital in Israel's most targeted city operates," Ha'aretz, 31.10.2023 [Hebrew].

The incidents reviewed in this report indicate a pattern of intentional harming of emergency personnel and medical facilities, or, as with Barzilai Hospital, indiscriminate rocket launching toward civilian areas within which hospitals are located. In both cases, the state and international bodies must investigate the testimonies and reports as war crimes.¹⁹

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¹⁹ The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition classifies both targeted and indiscriminate attacks as war crimes.