

“The Destruction of Gaza’s Healthcare System”, Dr. Lina Qasem Hassan, Physicians for Human Rights–Israel, “Eyes on Gaza”, 7.7.2025

Introduction

Hello everyone, and welcome to “Eyes on Gaza”, our daily gathering that combines protest and learning. Today, we are honored to host Dr. Lina Qasem Hassan, a family physician from Tamra and chair of Physicians for Human Rights–Israel. She will speak to us about the collapse of Gaza’s healthcare system. Dr. Hassan will speak for about 8–10 minutes, after which we will leave some time for a brief discussion. If you have questions, feel free to write them in the chat during or after her talk, and I will read them aloud. Lina, thank you so much for joining us today.

Lecture

Good afternoon and thank you for the invitation and for the Eyes on Gaza initiative, a truly important and vital platform. It’s a bit unfair to ask me to speak on such a vast topic in only ten minutes. There is so much to say about Gaza’s healthcare system today. I’d like to begin with a short text written by my colleague, Salah Haj Yahya, who runs the Mobile Clinic Program at Physicians for Human Rights. Until recently, we used to travel to Gaza every couple of months to provide medical aid and train local teams. That’s how we came to know Gaza’s health system well before October 7. Even then, the system was struggling: a chronic shortage of medical staff, the inability to leave Gaza for training, severe lack of medicines, and essential medical equipment. But none of that compares to what we’re seeing now.

Salah wrote: “Last week, Israel bombed the home of Dr. Marwan al-Sultan, killing him and his family—his wife, daughter, son-in-law, sister, and niece. According to reports, their bodies that arrived at the hospital were beyond recognition. Seventeen people were killed in that strike. We knew Dr. al-Sultan. We met him during several medical missions to Gaza. Our last meeting was in July 2023 at the Indonesian Hospital, which he devoted his life to building, managing, and protecting. I spoke with him at length then. He was quiet, kind, humble—entirely focused on the well-being of his patients and deeply committed to his work. Dr. al-Sultan was one of Gaza’s leading cardiologists, an expert in internal medicine, one of only two cardiologists serving the northern region of the Strip. He held two Jordanian board certifications, lectured at the Islamic University, and was a member of a regional council of medical specialists. He played a central role in training new physicians in interventional cardiology and overseeing medical licensing exams. After his home was destroyed in an earlier strike, he moved to another house—but he and his family were deliberately targeted again. According to his friend, Dr. Munir al-Bursh, ‘They didn’t just kill a doctor; they killed a scientist. This wasn’t an accident—he was targeted. He was the most knowledgeable cardiologist we had in Gaza. Now, there’s only one left in the entire north.’ Dr. al-Sultan never left the Indonesian Hospital, even under direct threats and bombardment. When the hospital was hit and rendered non-functional, patients were redirected to Kamal Adwan and al-Awda hospitals, and each time, he and his team rebuilt from scratch—beds, equipment, anything they could find—to ensure that people in the north still had access to at least minimal care. Even when the Indonesian Hospital was closed, he continued treating patients in makeshift stations in

neighborhoods like Shuja'iyya and Sheikh Radwan—even in private homes, community centers, or any building that could be turned into a place of healing. They were constantly forced to evacuate and improvise, but he never took off his white coat.”\

Since the war began, over 1,580 medical staff in Gaza have been killed. Others have been detained, tortured, or executed. Gaza's health system hasn't just collapsed—it has been systematically dismantled. Those responsible include the planners, commanders, executors, and those who remain silent in the face of these atrocities. Dr. al-Sultan's story illustrates the deliberate, targeted assault on Gaza's health infrastructure from the very beginning of this war. The destruction of healthcare is not incidental—it is part of the broader machinery of genocide, alongside bombing, starvation, and displacement. Israel understood from the outset: without a functioning health system, Gaza's population cannot survive. And so, that system became a target.

Since October 7, we have seen repeated, unprecedented patterns: direct attacks from land, sea, and air; military invasions of hospitals; sieges that cut off medical supplies, food, water, fuel, and electricity, rendering hospitals inoperable. Then came the direct storming of hospitals—Al-Shifa, Al-Awda, Kamal Adwan, the Indonesian Hospital, Nasser, and others. We have also seen targeted killings of medical staff. In Gaza today, being a healthcare worker is a death sentence. Homes are bombed, people are arrested or murdered simply for being physicians. Dr. Alaa al-Najjar Nasser lost her husband and nine of her children in a strike on her home. Fifteen paramedics were gunned down in cold blood while trying to save lives. Physicians are being arrested simply for who they are. We've collected testimonies from Gaza's detained medical staff who were stopped and detained by soldiers during evacuations. Once they were identified as doctors, they were taken. Just being a doctor is now grounds for arrest and torture. Some, like Dr. Adnan al-Bursh and Dr. Iyad al-Rantisi, died while in Israeli detention from torture and severe neglect.

Let me give you the numbers: 720 health facilities attacked, 1,580 medical staff killed, 360 detained—with 180 still held, 186 ambulances destroyed. And that's just the partial picture—Israel refuses to release full data. As of May 2025, 47 percent of essential medications are unavailable in Gaza. 65 per cent of basic medical consumables are missing. Out of 1,006 critical medical items, 649 are not available. To name just a few: 100 per cent of heart surgery equipment is unavailable, 87 percent of orthopedic surgery tools, 86 percent of ophthalmology tools, 57 percent of dialysis equipment. This is a humanitarian catastrophe. The Gaza Health Ministry reports over 56,000 direct deaths from military strikes—2.5 percent of Gaza's population, with an average of 90 people killed per day, including 28 children and 15 women.

Experts estimate the total death toll—including indirect deaths due to collapse of healthcare, clean water systems, food scarcity, and untreated chronic illness—could reach 180,000 to 200,000. People with heart disease, cancer, kidney failure, and other conditions are dying while waiting for evacuation. Since Israel seized control of the Rafah Crossing in May 2025, medical evacuations have stopped, and people are dying while waiting for care. A staggering figure: life expectancy in Gaza has dropped from 75 to 41 years in just one year.

Beyond mass death, there are thousands of survivors living with permanent disabilities. Over 4,000 children have lost at least one limb, making this the largest group of child amputees in modern

history. Today, fewer than 17 of Gaza's 38 hospitals are partially operational. CT scanners have dropped from 19 to 7. There are zero functioning MRI machines. Pathology labs and blood testing facilities are nearly nonexistent. Diagnostic capacity is almost zero. I also want to highlight the specific, gendered toll on Palestinian women. The collapse of the healthcare system, combined with displacement and siege, has led to catastrophic outcomes. As of May 2025, at least 50,000 pregnant women have had no access to regular prenatal care or safe childbirth. Over 130 babies are born every day in unsanitary, unsafe conditions without sterile equipment or trained staff. There has been a sharp rise in premature births, miscarriages, and low birth weights—attributed to trauma, malnutrition, and lack of basic medication. This represents a systematic assault on reproductive health. Women are denied access to contraception, stripped of control over their own bodies. This isn't coincidental. It is the predictable outcome of a systemic, deliberate policy.

According to international legal definitions, inflicting severe physical and psychological harm on a specific group—especially with disproportionate effects on women—constitutes a clear violation of the Genocide Convention. All of this happens amid deafening silence from the Israeli medical community. Doctors in Israel know what is happening to their colleagues in Gaza—just 90 minutes from Tel Aviv—and they say nothing. When Soroka Hospital in Israel was hit, it was rightly condemned as a war crime. Hospitals are protected under international law. But to hear politicians like Itamar Ben Gvir [the minister of National Security of Israel] invoke war crimes while ignoring the wholesale destruction of Gaza's hospitals is infuriating. The silence—even complicity—of Israel's medical institutions is appalling. Some have fully aligned themselves with the war agenda. Others choose willful ignorance. It is devastating to be a physician in such a system today.