

Dr. Michal Feldon, Paediatrician and Activist, “The Medical Community and the Genocide in Gaza”, 17.8.2025

Introduction

Hello to everyone. Today is the first day of the ninth week of *Eyes on Gaza*. A week that opened with protest and disruption, and our gathering here today, this assembly, is an act of strike, an act of continuous protest and of refusal to normalize the destruction and the killing and the horror and the starvation. We are insisting that the struggles are intertwined and that we must persist on all fronts. The struggle to bring back the hostages is also always a struggle to end the annihilation in Gaza, to end the occupation, to refuse settler violence and violence under the auspices of the army and the state. And therefore today we are gathering here together to make present our protest and our refusal. We are much thankful to our guest today, Dr. Michal Feldon, who is a paediatrician and activist, and she will speak with us about the silence of the medical community in the country in the face of the genocide in Gaza. Thank you, Michal.

Talk

Thank you for inviting me. I have many slides in my presentation. I'm not sure we'll get to all of them, but it's important for me to address the core subject of this talk. I want to emphasize the consistency of terminology: I speak of genocide, of extermination. From the moment that B'Tselem and 'Physicians for Human Rights' released their reports at the end of July, just recently, this has been the terminology. I sometimes use the word war in passing, but my meaning is always genocide.

This slide is very, very old—already more than a year. And it is striking that everything written on it is still true. Since October 2023, Gaza has been the deadliest place in the world, including for aid workers. It is the most dangerous place in the world for children. It is the most dangerous place in the world for journalists. It is the most destroyed place in the world compared with any previous war. It is the thirstiest place in the world. It is the hungriest place in the world. It is the most wounded place in the world, especially when speaking of children's injuries and amputations. And it is the most significant and prolonged attack on a healthcare system in the history of warfare. The most recent figures—published just a few days ago—report more than 60,000 dead [61,722], and 154,525 wounded. Regarding nutrition, the entire population is in a state of food insecurity; only the degree differs. Almost a quarter of the population is already at the threshold of phase five—the most severe stage of food insecurity.

The entire health system has been attacked repeatedly. About half of all hospitals are now only partially functioning. As for humanitarian aid—you can see over the months that in practice only a third of the requests of humanitarian organizations are carried out. Some never arrive, some are cancelled, others are delayed or blocked by bureaucracy. In the end, only about a third of the organizations succeed in bringing humanitarian aid into Gaza. Already in March 2024, Ido Efrati wrote a major article in *Haaretz* about the silence of the medical establishment. It came amid the Sde Teiman detention camp's affair and efforts to expel the last Gazan patients from Israel. But Efrati already wrote then, a year and a half ago that the health system had imposed silence on itself. It was true then, and it is true now.

I want to go through the episodes during this war—points where medical reality and the war met directly—where protest was clearly called for, and yet never came.

The first point regards the treatment of Palestinian patients before October 7th: According to B'Tselem, four thousand children from Gaza received treatment in Israel. That is a significant number of patients. I'll speak about children because that is my field. I believe there isn't a single paediatrician in a major Israeli public hospital who hasn't treated Gazan children. Since October, of

course, no child from Gaza has received treatment in Israel. Most patients who had been here were sent back to the West Bank or to Gaza. Israeli doctors who had followed them cannot say what happened. We have no cohort studies tracking outcomes for these children. We know some managed to flee, some lost contact, but in the end, we truly do not know what happened to our patients. And then there is the issue of treating Palestinian detainees—a problem already before October 7, but much worse since the war began. Some hospitals refused to treat detainees altogether. Treatment has been clearly inadequate. [In the photo] this is a small protest—10 or 12 doctors from Sheba Medical Center—who demonstrated in March 2024 against the attempt to deport their Gazan patients back to Gaza. The High Court of Justice managed to delay their deportation. Since then, they have been sent back.

The second point regards Palestinian and Arab medical staff in Israel: 25 percent of all medical personnel in the country are Arab or Palestinian. Since October 7, there has been a climate of fear and silencing. We are talking about dozens of hearings, suspensions, or dismissals—usually for political statements, most often simply expressions of solidarity with family members or people in Gaza. Sometimes over posts written years earlier. I don't know the precise figures, but I can say that there is not a single hospital or health organization in Israel without such cases, and in some hospitals there have been dozens. At the same time, genocidal statements are voiced constantly by Jewish staff in these same hospitals—phrases like “there are no innocents in Gaza.” If you are a Palestinian doctor working in an Israeli hospital and this is what you hear all day, it is an extremely unpleasant experience.

The last matter is weapons: the militarization that pervades this country, including hospitals, including even patients. I have seen pediatricians run clinics with a pistol in their pocket. In November 2023 there was a major medical event in Israel: 100 doctors signed a letter titled “Doctors for the Rights of IDF Soldiers,” calling on the army to bomb Al-Shifa Hospital. The phrase that will never be forgiven was: “It is a duty to destroy the wasps' nests”—referring to hospitals in Gaza. None of those doctors ever faced disciplinary action. Nothing was done.

The third point regards the harm to our colleagues in Gaza, to Gazan medical teams themselves: This slide is also old, it estimated 1,400 health workers harmed. Now the number is 1,500 to 1,600 killed. Around 400 medical staff have been arrested. Some we know are held in Israeli facilities, others have disappeared. We have abundant testimony of torture of medical staff in Israeli detention facilities, and some doctors have died there. There was the paramedics affair of March 2025—the largest episode, known to all. [In the photo] this is Hussam Abu-Safiya, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, abducted from the hospital after it was attacked in December 2024. [In the photo] this is Adnan al-Bursh, head of orthopedics at Al-Shifa Hospital, arrested in December 2023 during his work. Apparently held in Sde Teiman detention camp for several months, he died in April 2024, and we do not know the exact circumstances of his death. And this is one of the well-known images from the paramedics affair and the mass grave where they were found.