



Hamas's financial aid to the wounded and the families of those killed in the Return Marches

May 12, 2019

Overview

On April 21, 2019, **Ahmed al-Kurd, member of the Hamas Political Bureau and the Hamas official in charge of the Wounded Portfolio, announced the distribution of financial aid to families whose children were killed or wounded during the return marches.** The funds will be distributed through postal bank branches in the Gaza Strip. **The payment will reportedly be between NIS 300-600 per injured person, depending on the severity of the injury** (Safa, April 21, 2019). Ahmed al-Kurd estimates **that over the past year, services and treatments have been provided to more than 10,000 injured people at a total cost of \$5 million in less than a year.** In addition, treatments were financed for **many of the injured who were sent abroad for treatment,** mainly to Egypt and Turkey (Mitras website, March 29, 2019). The cost of the aid to the families of those killed is unknown.

► Right from the outset of the march project, Hamas realized that the marches were **exacting a heavy toll of dead and wounded,** many of them Hamas operatives, who were killed or wounded in clashes with IDF soldiers near the security fence. **Therefore, the treatment of the wounded, and assistance to the families of those killed, has preoccupied Hamas since the start of the marches.** Despite its economic difficulties, Hamas allocated large sums of money, initially amounting to tens of thousands of dollars, which subsequently rose to hundreds of thousands and reached millions of dollars. Senior Hamas figures reiterated the importance of the aid, and made sure to visit the wounded, including those hospitalized abroad. **Hamas's concern for the wounded and the families of those killed is also intended to encourage the continued participation of the Gazan population in the marches and halt the public criticism of its negligence in caring for the wounded, which began to be voiced as the marches continued.**

► In the ITIC's assessment, in the absence of alternative financial resources, **Hamas bears most of the costs of treating the wounded and assisting the families of those killed** (charitable societies and NGOs operating in the Gaza Strip also provide aid, which is of secondary importance). According to Ahmed al-Kurd, **the Palestinian Authority does not**

recognize the casualties of the marches and does not provide Hamas with the necessary funds for their treatment. Iran and Hezbollah promised to help, but no financial aid has apparently been provided to date. Therefore, it is Hamas that finances the aid, **mainly from resources in the Ministry of Finance controlled by the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip** (Al-Wataniya, December 23, 2018). **This budgetary resource, which is not authorized by the Palestinian Authority, is considered “temporary” by Hamas. It seems that Hamas is counting on the aid to the wounded and the families of those killed coming from the Palestinian Authority in the future, and on being included in the list of those entitled to receive funds from the Foundation for the Care of the Wounded and the Families of the Fatalities** (which is subordinate to the PLO and transfers funds from the budget of the Palestinian Authority).

Hamas’s aid to the casualties of the marches

► According to data provided by **Dr. Ashraf al-Qudra, spokesman for the Palestinian Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip**, from the beginning of the return marches (March 30, 2018) to April 12, 2019, **272 Palestinians were killed**. Another 16,722 were hospitalized, 552 of whom were seriously wounded (Dr. Ashraf al-Qudra’s Facebook page, April 18, 2019). **The figures which appeared in a UN report are 195 dead and 28,939 wounded, around half of whom required medical treatment** (according to OCHA data, March 27, 2019¹).

► **As early as the second week of the marches**, after it became clear that they were taking a heavy toll in casualties, **Hamas announced its intention to support the wounded**. In the first month of marches, several reports were published regarding the scope of the aid:

- ◆ On April 5, 2018, before the second Friday of the protest marches, **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** announced that Hamas was providing financial aid to the families of those killed and wounded. He said that the **sums would range from \$200 for those who were moderately wounded to \$3,000 for the families of shahids**. He stressed that these funds were an expression of Hamas’s **“social and national responsibility”** vis-à-vis those who have been hurt (Hamas website, April 5, 2018).

- ◆ On April 18, 2018, it was reported that Hamas had announced **the granting of financial aid for the treatment of 350 Palestinians injured during the return**

¹ (OCHA) **United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**. A UN agency established in 1991. The agency is responsible for humanitarian aid in distressed areas of the world. The agency has offices around the world, with a staff of around 1,900 (Wikipedia).

marches. According to Hamas, **the total amount of aid was \$75,000** for those who were moderately and severely wounded (Safa News Agency, April 18, 2018).

◆ On May 3, 2018, Hamas announced **the granting of financial aid to 187 people wounded in the return marches.** According to the announcement, 61 severely wounded Palestinians would be paid \$500 each and 126 moderately wounded Palestinians would be paid \$200 each. The recipients' eligibility would be based on **reports from the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip. The announcement also stated that the total payments that would be made to the wounded would amount to \$300,000.** Hamas made it clear that **the payments would be transferred to the wounded despite the difficult economic situation,** as a token of loyalty to the wounded and as part of Hamas's responsibility vis-à-vis the Palestinian people (Dunia Al-Watan, May 3, 2018).

► Once the Friday marches were established, following which the number of casualties increased, **Hamas decided to set up a designated entity to deal with the issue of aid.** To this end, a medical committee was established as one of the committees of the Supreme National Authority of the Return Marches, which coordinates the weekly marches. **However, the committee's function was apparently not to treat and assist the wounded and the families of those killed,** but rather to organize medical aid during the marches. Therefore, **it is Hamas that deals with this issue,** and the activity of the National Authority of the Return Marches is **limited to logistical medical issues during the marches themselves** (organizing ambulances, allocating paramedics, evacuating the wounded to hospitals, etc.). The National Authority also serves as a **conduit for the transfer of funds** from Hamas to the wounded and the families of those killed.

► According to Ahmad al-Kurd, they monitor the names and condition of the wounded on a daily basis in coordination with the Hamas-controlled Ministry of Health in Gaza. According to him, **the Supreme National Authority of the Return Marches provided services and treatment to over 10,000 wounded people at a total cost of \$5 million within less than a year, which was transferred to the wounded through (Hamas's) administration post office branches in each district.** According to him, **the source of the funds was the Ministry of Finance** (controlled by the Hamas administration) in the Gaza Strip. **According to him, the Palestinian Authority does not recognize the casualties of the return marches**

and does not provide Hamas with the necessary funds for their treatment (Al-Wataniya, December 23, 2018).

► Hamas's assistance to the casualties is not limited to financial aid. In late 2018, Ahmed al-Kurd, the Hamas official in charge of the Wounded Portfolio, said that all those wounded in the marches who lost limbs, were paralyzed or went blind, **would be hired by the Palestinian government in the beginning of the year**. He noted that the jobs would initially be temporary **and would subsequently become permanent** (Dunia Al-Watan, December 30, 2018). In an interview with Radio Al-Ra'i in Gaza, Al-Kurd said that an arrangement had been reached for **six months of employment at the Gaza Strip's government offices for 115 Palestinians injured in the Gaza Strip marches** (PALINFO, December 11, 2018).

Distribution of financial aid to the casualties

► Distribution of financial aid is carried out in several phases. Ahmed al-Kurd usually announces these phases in advance: In October 2018, funds were distributed to 2,000 families of those killed and the severely wounded, amounting to NIS 400-600 (Filastin Al-Aan, October 13, 2018). In December 2018, Ahmed al-Kurd announced the distribution of financial aid to 5,000 families. As part of this distribution phase, each family of a dead or severely wounded Palestinian received NIS 600 and a family of a moderately wounded Palestinian received NIS 300 (Al-Wataniya, December 23, 2018). In February 2019, Al-Kurd announced the distribution of financial aid amounting to NIS 300-600 to 4,000 families of severely wounded Palestinians (Islamic Bloc website, February 2, 2019).

Screenshot of the website of the Welfare Ministry of the Hamas administration in Gaza, where it is possible to check whether one is eligible for financial aid. The applicant is required to fill in the ID number and date of birth of the killed or wounded Palestinian. The title (in red) reads: Assistance to casualties of the return marches in April 2019 (website of the Gaza Welfare Ministry, May 1, 2019)

Accepting Palestinian wounded abroad

► Several countries undertook to assist or actually assisted both by transferring funds to Hamas and providing medical treatment to the wounded. Following is an overview of the situation:

- ◆ **Egypt:** Medical sources reported in May 2018 that four wounded Palestinians from the Gaza Strip were sent to Egypt for medical treatment (Al-Masry Al-Youm, May 24, 2018). It can be proved that since then, the number of wounded treated in Egypt increased. Senior Hamas officials including Ismail Haniya visited the wounded (Hamas's website, February 5, 2019).



Right: Ismail Haniya and members of Hamas's Political Bureau who were in Cairo visiting the wounded of the return marches who are hospitalized in Egyptian hospitals (Hamas's website, February 5, 2019). Left: Delegation of senior Hamas officials in Cairo meeting with wounded of the return marches who are treated at the Filastin Hospital in Cairo. Attending from Hamas: Moussa Abu Marzouq, Hussam Badran, Zaher Jabarin, Salah al-Bardawil, and Zakariya Abu Muammar (Hamas's website, November 23, 2018)

- ◆ **Jordan:** On May 23, 2018, it was reported that about 30 wounded were sent to Jordan for treatment (Al-Quds, May 23, 2018).
- ◆ **Iran:** Palestinian sources reported that with the improvement of relations between Hamas and Iran, **Iran undertook to transfer funds for the families of shahids and wounded of the return marches.** According to a source close to Hamas, **funds from Iran still have not arrived** (Al-Quds, March 4, 2019).
- ◆ **Hezbollah:** A meeting was held between senior Hamas officials and Hassan Hobballah, a former Lebanese MP and official in charge of relations with the Palestinians in Hezbollah. They discussed, among other things, ways to support the wounded and the families of shahids (Facebook page of PIJ representative in Lebanon

Ihsan Ataya, January 9, 2019). The ITIC does not have information indicating that Hezbollah actually provided support.

- ◆ **Syria:** In a meeting held between Khaled al-Batsh and Bouthaina Shaaban, Syrian President Assad's political advisor, she expressed her willingness to support the return marches and brought up the possibility of receiving some of the wounded of the marches for treatment in Syria (PalToday, January 7, 2019). The ITIC does not have information indicating that this has been implemented.

- ◆ **Turkey:** Several wounded were sent to Turkey. The wounded were visited by a Hamas delegation headed by Maher Salah (Facebook page of Sami Mahmoud al-Zahar, November 27, 2018; Facebook page of the Change and Reform faction, November 28, 2018).



**Hamas delegation visits wounded of the return marches hospitalized in Turkey
(Facebook page of Sami Mahmoud al-Zahar, November 27, 2018)**

- ◆ **Morocco:** Morocco's prime minister reported to Ismail Haniya that in compliance with his request, he decided to provide the Gaza Strip with a field hospital to treat the wounded of the return marches (Hamas's website, May 28, 2018).

- ◆ **EuroPalestine (France):** A ceremony was held in the Gaza Strip, in which financial aid in the sum of \$200 was distributed to 115 amputees. The aid was received from an organization called EuroPalestine. A sign at the ceremony expressed gratitude to the organization and to French donors (PALINFO, December 11, 2018).



Ahmed al-Kurd at an evening of appreciation and distribution of financial aid to the wounded (PALINFO, December 11, 2018)

◆ **Qatar:** On April 22, 2019, the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) announced at a festive ceremony the launch of Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Rehabilitation and Prosthetics Hospital.² According to Fund Director General Khalifa al-Kuwari, the hospital was established by funding from the Development Fund and under the supervision of the Qatari Committee for the Rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip, in cooperation with the Qatari Health Ministry, which sent doctors to operate the hospital and instruct the medical team.



Right: The façade of Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Rehabilitation and Prosthetics Hospital in Gaza (Facebook page of Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Rehabilitation and Prosthetics Hospital, April 22, 2019). Left: The hospital inauguration ceremony (Facebook page of the Qatari Committee for the Rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip, April 22, 2019)

Criticism of the treatment of the return march casualties

► As the return marches continued, criticism was starting to emerge in the Gaza Strip regarding the manner of treating the casualties. An investigative report published on the

² Many of the wounded of the return marches suffered limb injuries.

MENA Monitor website in October 2018 exposed extensive public criticism on the part of the casualties of the return marches in the Gaza Strip. This criticism was voiced due to medical negligence, lack of proper treatment, medical malpractice and amputation of limbs as a manner of treating injuries instead of using alternatives. Several wounded complained about overcrowding in the hospitals and their quick discharge from the hospital although they still had not recovered from their injury.

► **Salah Abd al-Ati, member of the legal committee in the Supreme National Authority of the Return Marches**, responded to the criticism noting that it is indeed difficult sometimes to treat the wounded due to the large number of casualties. According to him, severe cases are treated first and only then those moderately and lightly wounded are treated. Abd al-Ati also notes that non-governmental institutions in the Gaza Strip treat wounded of the marches free of charge and give assistance to those who need a continued treatment abroad (MENA Monitor website, October 23, 2018).

Appendix

Ahmed al-Kurd's activity

► Ahmed al-Kurd is a senior Hamas figure from Deir al-Balah. Formerly, he served as the Welfare Minister and Minister of Labor in the Hamas government and as mayor of Deir al-Balah. He also served as chairman of the Al-Salah Islamic Society, which is considered one of the largest charitable associations in the Gaza Strip, affiliated with Hamas. Today, he is a **member of the Hamas Political Bureau in the Gaza Strip, in charge of Hamas's Wounded Portfolio, and chairman of the association of charitable institutions in the Gaza Strip.**

► An online search Internet revealed evidence connecting him to the return marches and to Hamas's activity related to casualties of the return marches:

- ◆ A video entitled “**Surgeries carried out on wounded of the return marches in the movement [i.e., Hamas's] hospitals**” was found on the Facebook page of Dr. Muhammad Rantisi.³ The video shows Ahmed al-Kurd, who is described as **chairman of the office of shahids and wounded [of Hamas]**. Al-Kurd notes in the video that the wounded department took upon itself to carry out operations of the wounded of the marches in the department hospitals after an agreement was reached with several doctors, including Dr. Rantisi. Rantisi himself notes in the video that **the charitable associations in the Gaza Strip** took upon themselves to finance the medical treatment of the wounded, including operations that are carried out on them free of charge (Facebook page of Dr. Muhammad Rantisi, October 7, 2018).

³ Dr. Muhammad Rantisi is the head of the Department of Hand Surgery and Peripheral Nervous System in the Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza. His wife, Umm al-Baraa Rantisi, is a senior activist in Hamas's Women's Movement and a member of the Women's Committee of the Supreme National Authority of the Return March.



A video entitled “Surgeries carried out on wounded of the return marches in the movement [i.e., Hamas’s] hospitals” presents Ahmed al-Kurd as chairman of the office of shahids and wounded (Facebook page of Dr. Muhammad Rantisi, October 7, 2018)

- ◆ In other posts on Facebook, Al-Kurd was presented as **the official in charge of the Wounded Portfolio in Hamas** (Facebook page of Amer Abu al-Qumsan, July 23, 2018; Facebook page of Shabakat I’lam al-Shaja’iya, April 25, 2019).



Ahmed al-Kurd, who is in charge of the Wounded Portfolio, visits the wounded of the return marches on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr in June 2018 (Facebook page of Ahmed al-Kurd, June 17, 2018)

- ◆ Ahmed al-Kurd’s participation in the return marches was documented on several Fridays (Facebook page of Banu Muadh, March 31, 2019; Facebook page of Ahmed al-Kurd, April 20, 2018; Wosta News Facebook page, April 15, 2018). He also delivered a speech at one of the marches in the Return Camp in eastern Gaza (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Return Marches, March 22, 2019).



Right: Ahmed al-Kurd being interviewed during one of the return marches (Facebook page of Ahmed al-Kurd, April 20, 2018). Left: Ahmed al-Kurd delivering a speech at the Return Camp in eastern Gaza (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Return Marches, March 22, 2019)