



Hamas’s fight against COVID-19 in the Gaza Strip (updated to April 5, 2020)

April 5, 2020

Morbidity

On March 31, 2020, two new COVID-19 cases were identified among people returning from Egypt to the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing. They were quarantined. **This brings the number of patients in the Gaza Strip to 12.** According to the spokesman for the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip, **five patients have already recovered** and the condition of the rest is “stable and encouraging” (Al-Ra’i News Agency, April 4, 2020).

► According to the spokesman for the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip, Dr. Ashraf al-Qidra, **there are now 1,897 people in 27 quarantine centers.** They are all in good health and are soon to be released. The schools serving as quarantine centers will be disinfected 24 hours after they are discharged, so that the facilities can be reused (Al-Ra’i News Agency, April 4, 2020).



Exercise in admitting and treating COVID-19 patients (Facebook page of the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip, April 2, 2020)

Preventive measures by the Hamas administration

COVID-19 tests

► According to the spokesman for the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip, **COVID-19 testing has been increased**. According to him, 1,148 tests were carried out by April 3, 2020, compared to 830 tests carried out in March. According to a senior Health Ministry official, about 100 tests per day have been carried out in the past few days (Al-Ra'i News Agency, April 1, 2020; Health Ministry website, April 3; NEWPAL, March 31). On April 4, the spokesman announced that due to a shortage of COVID-19 tests, within a few days testing **would become impossible**. **The spokesman called on the relevant entities to supply sufficient quantities of these kits and testing materials** (Al-Ra'i News Agency, April 4, 2020).

Abilities of the health system in the Gaza Strip

► According to the Health Ministry spokesman, **43% of medications, 25% of biodegradable medical supplies, and 65% of laboratory and blood bank equipment have all run out, and there is a severe shortage of disinfectants and protective equipment**. According to him, **Gaza urgently needs 100 ventilators and 140 intensive care unit beds in order to provide an initial response to COVID-19, adding that at present, there are only 63 ventilators and 78 intensive care unit beds**, and that they barely meet the day-to-day needs of ordinary patients, who make up 72% of all hospital patients. The spokesman expressed **concern over the relevant parties' delay in responding to the Health Ministry's distress call to provide the medical needs for the fight against COVID-19**, calling on them to take urgent steps to meet the demands (Al-Ra'i News Agency, April 1, 2020).

► In another briefing, the spokesman noted that the capabilities of the Hamas health system in the Gaza Strip are limited, claiming that the reason for this was the ongoing "Israeli blockade." He called on international bodies to provide **\$23 million** to support the urgent needs of the Health Ministry (Al-Ra'i News Agency, April 2, 2020). He added that **the assistance that they had received from the various bodies to date was "disgraceful" and did not help them fight COVID-19**. The spokesman again called on the relevant bodies to take responsibility and support the urgent needs of the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip with medicines, biodegradable medical products, protective equipment, laboratory equipment and spare parts for medical devices (Al-Ra'i News Agency, April 4, 2020).

The response of the Hamas administration

► Hamas's administrative institutions recently issued additional announcements, including guidelines to residents on how to deal with COVID-19:

◆ **The spokespersons for the Health Ministry and the Interior Ministry** called on residents to wear masks during their visits to clinics, markets and public places. **The spokesman for the Interior Ministry** called on residents to stay home as much as possible and comply with the decision to prevent gatherings, and close function halls, markets and mosques (Al-Ra'i News Agency, April 4, 2020).

◆ **Governmental Monitoring Committee Chairman Muhammad Awad** said that there was a sufficient stock of goods at regular prices. Preparation of goods continues at the commercial crossings, and all the precautions are being taken. In addition, it was decided to keep schools and universities closed; allocate \$1 million in emergency aid to 10,000 families affected by the emergency; donate money to families in need (NIS 200 per family to be given by Hamas administration employees); and pay salaries to Hamas administration employees on April 2 (Al-Ra'i News Agency, March 31, 2020).



**Payment of salaries at the Ministry of Education in the Gaza Strip
(Ministry's Facebook page, April 2, 2020)**

◆ **The chairman of the Governmental Monitoring Committee** said that steps were being taken **to improve the capabilities of the Hamas administration's health system**, while cuts in the budgets of other ministries were expected due to the emergency measures. According to him, relevant officials, led by the Public Service Commission, were ordered to urgently begin **the process of hiring new personnel at the Health Ministry**. A total of 339 jobs will be added, including 90 physicians. Moreover, orders have been issued to provide the Health Ministry with 300 temporary employment contracts for various jobs. In addition, the equipping of the Turkish Hospital has begun,

in order to reinforce the health care system in the fight against COVID-19 (Al-Ra'i News Agency, March 31, 2020).

◆ According to the spokesman for the Gaza Strip police, the police are continuing to implement the decision to close the weekly open markets throughout the Gaza Strip. On the other hand, the recognized daily open markets remain open, with precautions being taken along with stringent adherence to the rules against civilian gatherings (website of the Palestinian Police in the Gaza Strip, April 1, 2020).



Khan Yunis police closing the weekly Wednesday open market (GazaPress Twitter account, April 1, 2020). Police have permitted the opening of temporary points of sale instead of the closed market.

◆ According to the **Governor of the Currency Authority, Azzam Al-Shawa**, the Currency Authority **managed to bring NIS 50 million into the Gaza Strip** for the bank branches operating in the Gaza Strip, in order to meet the needs of the residents. This is because demand for shekels has recently increased due to the state of emergency (Currency Authority website, April 2, 2020).

Activity of Yahya Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip

Highlights of the interview with Yahya Sinwar

► On April 2, Yahya Sinwar was interviewed by Al-Aqsa TV and the Shehab Agency and answered questions asked by social media users. He noted that Hamas was working to make the Gaza Strip free of COVID-19 and praised the measures taken so far, which he said had curbed the spread of the virus into the Gaza Strip.

► Following are the main points made by Sinwar:

- ◆ A call for donors to supply the Gaza Strip with ventilators and other medical equipment needed to combat COVID-19. Sinwar called on residents to comply with the medical guidelines, reduce their movements, avoid gatherings and support one another. According to him, there is a “strategic inventory” of goods and goods arriving in the Gaza Strip are disinfected before entering. He added that Hamas had prepared a plan to ensure the arrival of food products for the residents.
- ◆ Sinwar noted that the people entering the Gaza Strip are sent to isolation centers and pledged to deal with anyone who evades the isolation centers. He was asked why a complete lockdown had not been imposed on the Gaza Strip and replied that there are patients in need of treatment abroad and “they cannot be sentenced to death.” He stressed that anyone returning from abroad, civilians and Hamas operatives, must self-isolate. He said, **“We knew that we would encounter resistance from residents of the areas [where the isolation centers are located]”** but there was no alternative.
- ◆ Sinwar noted that an emergency plan had been formulated by the Interior Ministry, the Health Ministry and other relevant ministries **in the event that COVID-19 cases are discovered in the Gaza Strip**. In this case, anyone who came in contact with them would be isolated, and a lockdown would be imposed. If necessary, a lockdown would also be imposed on the entire Gaza Strip. He added, “We are ready for the worst-case scenario [...] Hamas has bought 30 ventilators and there are donations and initiatives to increase the number of ventilators.”
- ◆ According to Sinwar, Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades commander Abu Khaled al-Deif is closely monitoring the situation. He ordered the mobilization of all the resources of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades in order to fight COVID-19 (in the original: “to protect our people”). Operatives of the medical community of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades visit people who had been in isolation in order to ensure that they are healthy.

In response to statements made by Israeli Defense Minister Naftali Bennett, who made the entry of medical equipment into the Gaza Strip conditional on the release of soldiers in Gaza, Sinwar said: “We do not need anything from the occupation, and we have brains and willpower in the Gaza Strip, and we do not need Naftali Bennett. When we need ventilators, I say to Bennett, **we will make six million Israeli settlers stop breathing. When our people need ventilators and medical equipment**, we will take from you what is needed [as they take]

protection money (in the original: *khawa*), and know that we are capable of doing so” (Shehab Twitter account, April 2 2020).



Collecting protection money through rocket fire: cartoon by Palestinian cartoonist Ala al-Luqta entitled “Through protection money (in the original: *khawa*): Gaza is connected to a ventilator in the form of a rocket” (PALDF forum, April 2, 2020)

Visit to Rafah crossing

► On March 31, 2020, Yahya Sinwar visited the commercial section of the Rafah crossing. He was accompanied by Hamas officials and Hamas administration officials in the Gaza Strip. The purpose of his visit was to examine the precautions employed in the transfer of goods to the Gaza Strip. In addition, he heard an explanation from the medical staff about the preventive steps being taken at the crossing and about the field hospital at the Rafah crossing for isolating COVID-19 patients. Sinwar also visited a site where 500 isolation units are currently under construction (Hamas website, March 31, 2020).



**Yahya Sinwar’s visit to the Rafah crossing
(Hamas website, March 31, 2020)**

Initial protests due to Hamas's preventive measures

► Two police officers were wounded on April 3, when residents living in the vicinity of the Muscat Primary Health Care Center in Jabalia, which serves as an isolation center, threw rocks at them after resisting self-isolation. One of the security personnel was severely wounded in the head and the other was wounded in the leg. The security personnel called in operatives of the Intervention and Order Maintenance force, who surrounded the area (Amad News Agency, April 3, 2020).



The Muscat Primary Health Care Center in Jabalia, which serves as an isolation center (Twitter account of the Omani Charitable Authority, March 2, 2020)

► Mohammad al-Farran of Khan Yunis was arrested by police for posting on Facebook about the [harsh] conditions of those in quarantine (Independent Human Rights Authority website, April 2, 2020).

Transfer of medical aid to the Gaza Strip

► On April 1, the Palestinian Authority health minister announced that **the World Health Organization (WHO) had sent 1,500 swabs to the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip.** According to her, they were part of the swabs obtained by the General Intelligence service (Facebook page of the Palestinian Authority Health Ministry, April 1, 2020). On April 3, the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) announced that **1,500 swabs donated by the WHO had been sent to the Gaza Strip in coordination with the Gaza District Coordination and Liaison (DCL) on April 2** (COGAT's Facebook page, April 3, 2020). Dr. Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip, said in response that 1,500 test tubes for taking samples had been sent from Ramallah, at an estimated cost of \$4,000, and that

they cannot be used without the associated testing materials (Al-Ra'i News Agency, April 4, 2020).



Right: The health minister announcing the transfer of the swabs to the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of the Palestinian Authority Health Ministry, April 1, 2020); Left: Shipment of swabs sent to the Gaza Strip (COGAT's Facebook page, April 3, 2020)

► Additional external aid for the fight against COVID-19 promised or transferred to the Gaza Strip:

- ◆ On March 31, 2020, medical equipment and chemical laboratory materials needed for COVID-19 testing were sent to the Gaza Strip at the request of the WHO (COGAT's Facebook page, March 31, 2020).
- ◆ **Qatari Committee to Rebuild Gaza Chairman Mohammad al-Amadi** announced that the Committee, in coordination with the Qatari Development Fund, would finance the temporary employment of 100 healthcare personnel, doctors and nurses, for six months. This is in order to assist the teams of the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip in the fight against COVID-19. According to him, the funding was included in Emir of Qatar's \$150 million grant to the Gaza Strip (website of the Qatari Committee to Rebuild Gaza, April 2, 2020).
- ◆ **Dr. Kamal Musa, director of public relations at the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip, said that to date, the WHO had sent about 1,000 COVID-19 test kits to the Gaza Strip** (NEWPAL website, March 31, 2020).
- ◆ **The American hospital in the northern Gaza Strip** posted on its Facebook page that it had donated thousands of personal protection kits (Facebook page of Friend Ships – Project – Camp Gaza, March 23, 2020). Dr. Kamal Musa was asked about the American hospital's announcement that it was preparing thousands of aid kits for the Gaza Strip for the fight against COVID-19. He replied that no one had given them this aid, nothing was coordinated with them and they had received nothing (NEWPAL website, March 31, 2020).

◆ **The Palestine office of the British Human Appeal Association announced the start of a three-month operation to disinfect the water sources in the Gaza Strip** as part of the fight against COVID-19. To this end, liquid chlorine will be supplied at a cost of \$300,000, to be funded jointly with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the occupied Palestinian territory (OCHA oPt). The association's office has begun to distribute the chlorine in the jurisdiction of 25 towns in the Gaza Strip, for 284 wells, 55 central water reservoirs, desalination plants and important water facilities (Qudsnet, April 3, 2020).



Disinfection of wells throughout the Gaza Strip funded by the Human Appeal Association (Facebook page of the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU), April 2, 2020)