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Palestine: Increase in Israeli attacks against civilians and healthcare in Jenin

In the dim light of a hospital room, Amin, 17, is lying on a bed after being shot in both legs by Israeli Forces on 19 November 2023, during a ground and air assault on Jenin refugee camp in the northern West Bank.

Prior to 7 October, Israeli Forces had killed 205 Palestinians in the West Bank, while Israeli settlers were responsible for nine more deaths. Of these deaths, 52 occurred in Jenin alone.

On 19 June, Israeli forces began conducting air strikes in the West Bank, something that had not occurred since the second intifada in the early 2000s. Far from being an isolated event, this was to become more frequent. On 3 July, during a 48-hour military operation in the densely populated Jenin refugee camp, bombs were dropped from fighter jets and strikes were conducted with drones.

On the ground, the escalation of violence has followed the same trend. In Khalil Suleiman hospital emergency room, supported by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Israeli Forces launched a tear gas grenade inside the emergency room, compounding the already critical influx of patients. Throughout the military incursion, MSF witnessed the obstruction of ambulances and the targeting of healthcare facilities, elements that have become commonplace in the months that followed.

As the raid began on 19 November, Amin was walking home when an Israeli soldier shot him in both legs. Despite there being a hospital next to the camp, the ambulance could not reach Amin for over two hours as Israeli forces restricted the movement of ambulances, surrounded the hospital, and cut off access to the facility by blocking the main road with armoured vehicles.

Bleeding profusely, Amin was picked up from the street by a medical volunteer and taken to one of the few trauma stabilisation points in the camp – a simple room with little more than a bed frame and a few medical supplies. The goal was simply to stop the bleeding.

Inside the camp, these trauma stabilisation points, established, and run by self-organised local medical volunteers, are the only places where camp residents can receive lifesaving medical help. Yet these points have been repeatedly targeted by drone strikes or destroyed and vandalised by ground troops. Israeli Forces are now preventing volunteers from rebuilding the trauma points or establishing new ones according to the camp volunteers.

“The situation here is horrible,” says one of the nurses working in MSF-supported Khalil Suleiman hospital located next to the refugee camp in Jenin city.

“We used to have a football team in the camp. From 20 players in the team, only seven are still alive, many of them have been killed since July 2023. They were young, between 17 and 22 years old,” he says.

“The situation today in the West Bank and particularly in Jenin is extreme. We have seen a significant increase in violence against civilians, and it has been increasing rapidly since 7 October,” says Luz Saavedra MSF coordinator in Jenin.

“Attacks on healthcare have increased dramatically and become systematic. The destruction of roads and infrastructure such as water pipes and sewage systems have also been alarming,” says Saavedra.

In the last few weeks, Israeli Forces have besieged multiple hospitals in Jenin, creating a direct impediment to healthcare, and even shot and killed a teenage boy in the Khalil Suleiman hospital compound. The obstruction of healthcare has unfortunately become common practice. During each incursion, various hospitals, including the public one, were surrounded by Israeli Forces.

“The lack of respect for hospitals is staggering – since October, we have witnessed the shooting and killing of a 16-year-old boy in the hospital compound, soldiers firing live rounds and tear gas at the hospital several times, paramedics forced to strip and kneel in the street,” says Saavedra.

“Aside from the direct violence, the consistent blocking of access to healthcare is also putting the lives of camp residents at risk and appears to have become standard operating procedure for military forces during and following the military raids in Jenin.

"As obvious as it may sound, we cannot provide treatment for patients who don't make it to the hospital. People in need must be able to safely access medical services and health facilities need to be protected," she says.

This year has been the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank. Amin may have survived this attack, but his future is uncertain.

"Anyone can be targeted at any time here. We never know who will be next," says Amin as he is about to be discharged from the hospital and return to his home in the camp.

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West Bank: Article on increasing number of attacks by Israeli armed forces on Jenin refugee camp; hospitals on the compound have been attacked on several occasions

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Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for
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Wiedner Hauptstraße
32, 1041 Wien
T +43 1 589 00 583
F +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
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F.A.Q.
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