

The Health Ministry and IMA's Neglect of their Duty to Provide Adequate Healthcare for Incarcerated Palestinians in Prisons and Hospitals¹

Background

Since the Gaza war began in October 2023, the number of Palestinians detained in Israeli prisons has doubled to nearly 10,000, including an unprecedented 3,500 held under administrative detention.² Additionally, thousands have been arrested in the Gaza Strip and are currently detained in Israeli military facilities. Most have been designated as "unlawful combatants," a classification that permits their detention for extended periods, sometimes for months, without access to legal counsel or a court hearing.³

The detained Palestinians are held in prisons and military facilities under harsh conditions, including severe overcrowding, medical neglect, and malnutrition due to inadequate and insufficient meals. Additionally, they face violence, torture, humiliation, and abuse, which have already led to dozens of deaths.⁴ Physicians for Human Rights–Israel (PHRI) is aware of at least 60 Palestinians who have died in the custody of the Israel Prison Service (IPS) and the Israeli military since October 2023. Although this number is already unprecedented, there are reasons to suspect that the actual death toll could be even higher.

Among those detained are elderly individuals, women, minors, and people with chronic illnesses, injuries, and disabilities. Since the onset of the war, the Israeli military has also detained over 100 healthcare professionals in Gaza.

PHRI has collected hundreds of testimonies through attorney visits to IPS incarceration facilities. Additionally, PHRI has collected accounts from individuals who have been released and whistleblowers among Israeli physicians working in military detention facilities. These testimonies reveal widespread systemic violations of the rights of detained and incarcerated Palestinians, including the denial of medical care and confinement in conditions that seriously harm their health, even in situations involving high-risk and urgent medical needs.

In February 2024, PHRI published a report detailing the conditions outlined above. This report was based on numerous attorney visits, medical records of incarcerated individuals obtained from the IPS, and communications with various authorities. It also references autopsy reports prepared by

¹ Clarification of responsibilities: The Israeli Ministry of Health oversees Israel's public hospitals, including the treatment of detained individuals brought to these hospitals, and is responsible for all public health policies. The Israel Medical Association (IMA) serves as the representative labor association for physicians in Israel. Beyond its role as a labor association, the IMA is involved in maintaining the professional and ethical standards of the medical field and upholding the quality and reputation of medical practice in Israel. Members of the medical unit of the Israel Prison Service (IPS) are generally prohibited from joining the IMA, with the exception of the IPS Chief Medical Officer, who is even a member of the IMA's ethics committee.

² Administrative detention is the practice of detaining individuals without formal charges, based on confidential information, and for an indefinite period.

³ The definition of 'unlawful combatant' does not entitle those classified as such to prisoner of war status under international humanitarian law, which Israel is obligated to follow.

⁴ PHRI Report: [Systemic violations of human rights: The incarceration conditions of Palestinians in Israel since October 7](#) – pages 13-16, 25-33.

volunteer physicians who were present in the autopsies on behalf of PHRI. The report provides extensive details about the conditions faced by Palestinians in Israeli prisons and highlights the systemic violation of their rights, including their right to health, since the war began.

The Ministry of Health and the denial of medical care to injured detained Palestinians

After the events of October 7, 2023, and following directives from the Health Ministry, several hospitals in Israel began refusing to provide medical care for incarcerated Palestinians. On October 11, 2023, then-Health Minister Moshe Arbel called on the Israeli Prime Minister to instruct the healthcare system to refuse treatment to "terrorists" in public hospitals. Arbel argued that treating them would hinder the hospitals' ability to care for Israeli military and civilian casualties.⁵

After the minister's demands were made public, media outlets reported statements from the directors of several Israeli hospitals, including Sheba, Ichilov, Hadassah, and Shamir, announcing their refusal to treat incarcerated Palestinians.⁶ Reports also indicated multiple instances of hospitals denying medical care to detained Palestinians brought in by the military.⁷

The next day, PHRI contacted the Ministry of Health and the Israel Medical Association (IMA), urging them to publicly condemn these statements and take corrective measures. PHRI highlighted that it is the duty of these bodies to ensure that incarcerated individuals receive medical care in line with Israeli law, international treaties, and ethical medical standards. As a result, the IMA sent a letter to physicians emphasizing that "Israeli physicians are required to adhere to international conventions, medical ethics principles, and the Geneva Declaration." The letter also underscored that "physicians must provide all necessary medical care, whether in hospitals, prisons, or military facilities, and should be guided exclusively by medical considerations."

Regrettably, the IMA's appeal appears to have had little impact. Many hospitals continued denying treatment to incarcerated patients, even those already at the hospital doors.⁸ Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health did not respond to PHRI's appeal or take any action to address the statements made by its minister or hospital directors. It also failed to address the importance of upholding ethical guidelines and laws or the obligation to treat every individual based solely on their medical condition, regardless of their background or alleged crimes.⁹

⁵ <https://www.ynet.co.il/health/article/byjh7g4wa>

⁶ <https://www.mako.co.il/tv-morning-news/articles/Article-ebc92db51022b81027.htm>
<https://doctorsonly.co.il/2023/10/297624/?hilite=%27%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%95%27%2032%202C%27%D7%9C%D7%98%D7%A4%D7%9C%27%2C%27%D7%91%D7%9E%D7%97%D7%91%D7%9C%27%2C%27%20%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%A7%D7%95%27>

⁷ <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/sypzeiez6>

⁸ <https://www.now14.co.il/%D7%9C%D7%90-%D7%9E%D7%AA%D7%99%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%99%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%91%D7%99%D7%94%D7%97-%D7%94%D7%93%D7%A1%D7%94-%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%91-%D7%9C%D7%98%D7%A4%D7%9C-%D7%91%D7%9E%D7%97/>

⁹ PHRI Report: [Systemic violations of human rights: The incarceration conditions of Palestinians in Israel since October 7](#) – pages 20-23

In light of directives from the Health Ministry and hospital administrations to withhold care from detained Palestinians, PHRI submitted another inquiry to the relevant authorities. PHRI sought clarification on where detained Palestinians, especially those arrested in Gaza, would receive treatment when they require medical care that is only available in public hospitals. The responses from both the Health Ministry and the IMA were ambiguous, asserting that anyone needing medical care would receive it based on their needs. They further claimed that the standard of care provided meets the requirements set by wartime standards.

Given these responses and reports of hospitals continuing to deny treatment to detained Palestinians, it is clear that the issue remains unresolved.¹⁰ Testimonies from Israeli physicians confirm that, even months after the war started, some hospitals still refuse to admit detained Palestinians who are ill or injured. In other cases, when hospitalized, their stay is extremely short, and they receive only minimal treatment before being sent back to their detention facilities, even in situations involving life-threatening medical conditions.

Sde Teiman military facility

Throughout October, Health Ministry guidelines on the hospitalization of incarcerated Palestinians remained unchanged, the IMA continued to take no effective action, and public hospitals persisted in their refusal to admit detained Gazans. Consequently, Israeli officials decided to set up a field hospital at the Sde Teiman military base, situated 31 kilometers from the Gaza Strip and near the city of Be'er Sheva. This choice was made even though there are several nearby hospitals, including Soroka Hospital, one of Israel's largest.¹¹

Since the war began, the Sde Teiman military base has functioned as a makeshift detention facility for those arrested in Gaza. Individuals who are detained there are kept in large cages, blindfolded, and with their hands restrained at all times. They are prohibited from speaking or moving, under threat of violent punishment. The Red Cross is barred from entering the facility (as well as from all other Israeli detention facilities and prisons since the start of the war), and no other independent oversight bodies have been granted access.¹²

In December, PHRI obtained a Health Ministry document detailing the medical treatment and operations guidelines at the Sde Teiman field hospital. The guidelines clarify that the Ministry of Health directly runs the hospital within the detention facility. Physicians are enlisted into the Israeli military but are not part of its medical corps. The document contains several directives deviating from established ethical norms and contradicting medical standards.

According to the ministry's directives, patients must receive medical treatment in the field hospital while remaining cuffed and blindfolded. Physicians are prohibited from identifying themselves by name, signing any documents with their names, or providing their medical license number. This

¹⁰ PHRI Report: [Systemic violations of human rights: The incarceration conditions of Palestinians in Israel since October 7](#)
– page 22

¹¹ <https://hevra.org.il/%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%AA-%D7%91%D7%AA%D7%99-%D7%97%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%9D/>

¹² <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd/index.html>

insistence on anonymity raises grave concerns that it may be intended to obstruct investigations and/or prevent complaints regarding possible violations of medical ethics and practices.

The guidelines also specify that patient consent is typically required but may be waived in particular situations, such as emergencies needing immediate life-saving treatment, to prevent severe and irreversible disability, or when it is not feasible to obtain consent from the patient. However, according to testimonies gathered by PHRI, medical care at the field hospital is largely provided without prior explanation to the patient or any attempt to obtain their consent. Minor surgical procedures (those not involving large body cavities) may be carried out on-site at the discretion of the facility's senior medical official. The guidelines also state that "general anesthesia should be administered, when possible, with the involvement of anesthetists"—a non-binding recommendation that suggests a lower standard of medical care. This further indicates that the field hospital does not provide an adequate alternative to the care available in civilian hospitals.¹³ According to a medic who visited the facility, staff refer to it as a "paradise for medical residents"—as they can gain experience and carry out medical procedures for which they are not trained.¹⁴

Beyond what is explicitly stated in the guidelines, there is a notable absence of any requirement for medical staff to report suspected cases of violence and torture. Such cases are neither documented in medical records nor reported to the relevant authorities. The lack of emphasis on this duty, particularly in a facility of this kind, shows a blatant disregard for the responsibilities and recommendations for medical staff in incarceration settings. This includes those outlined in the Istanbul Protocol,¹⁵ WMA guidelines¹⁶, and even IMA guidelines, which specify that “physicians who witness interrogations or acts of torture in violation of international conventions are obligated to report these incidents to the appropriate authorities.”¹⁷ According to reports, the screams of detainees being tortured and subjected to violent punishment can be clearly heard through the tents of the field hospital, which are situated just a few dozen meters from the cages where they are held. Additionally, patients arrive with severe injuries indicative of violence, and physicians perform limb amputations due to injuries sustained from continuous restraint. Given these circumstances, it is highly likely that the medical staff are aware of what is occurring in the detention facility.¹⁸

Physicians who previously worked at the field hospital urged the Ministry of Health to send representatives from its ethics committee to review and address the conditions at the site. Despite this, the Ministry of Health has upheld the guidelines it set in December 2023 without any amendments. In May 2024, the IMA's ethics committee visited the facility, though its members' identities were kept confidential. A July article on the Ynet website noted that the committee

¹³ PHRI report: [Medical ethics and the detention of Gazan residents since the start of the 2023 war, An ethical opinion paper – pages 9-11](#)

¹⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd/index.html>

¹⁵ Istanbul Protocol: Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2022 edition)

¹⁶ WMA Statement on the Responsibility of Physicians in the Documentation and Denunciation of Acts of Torture or Cruel or Inhuman or Degrading Treatment.

¹⁷ Dr. Tami Karni (Editor), *Ethical Rules in Scientific Publications*, Ethics Board of the Israel Medical Association, 2023, Chapter 4: Doctor-Society Relations, Section B: Prohibition on the Participation of Doctors in Investigations and Torture.

¹⁸ PHRI report: [Medical ethics and the detention of Gazan residents since the start of the 2023 war, An ethical opinion paper – page 12.](#)

organizers were careful not to include physicians who volunteer for organizations like PHRI. Additionally, Ynet reported that the Ministry of Health was displeased with the visit, viewing it as an overstep of the IMA's authority.¹⁹

In March 2024, Haaretz reported that a physician who had worked at the field hospital sent a letter to the Israeli Ministers of Defense and Health, as well as the Attorney General, detailing the conditions at the facility. The physician warned that the conditions compromise the health of those held at the site and put the state at risk of violating the law. He noted that "just this week, two patients had their legs amputated due to injuries from being cuffed. Sadly, this has become routine." Additionally, the physician reported that patients are fed through straws, use diapers for defecation, and remain handcuffed at all times, all of which breach medical standards and legal regulations.²⁰ As the letter further states:

"Since the early days of the field hospital's operation, I have been grappling with challenging ethical dilemmas. More importantly, it is crucial to highlight that the practices at the site do not adhere to any of the health-related standards mandated by the Unlawful Combatants Law... This implicates all of us—both medical staff and officials from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Defense—in the violation of Israeli law. As a physician, I am even more troubled by the violation of my fundamental commitment to provide equal care to all patients—a pledge I made upon graduating 20 years ago."²¹

In May 2024, another anonymously authored article by a physician who observed the practices at Sde Teiman was published, describing similar conditions.²²

In December 2023, PHRI submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Israeli military to obtain data on the number of individuals who had died in its custody. The request was not responded within the requested timeframe. By early March 2024, Haaretz reported that 27 Gazans had died in Israeli military detention facilities since the start of the war, including at Sde Teiman.²³ In May 2024, Le Monde reported, based on unofficial information it had obtained, that more than 40 Gazans had died while in Israeli custody.²⁴ It was only in July 2024 that the Israeli army, responded to PHRI's appeal, based on the Freedom of Information Request, and acknowledged 44 detained Gazans had died in its custody, most of whom likely died at Sde Teiman, the main detention facility for those arrested in Gaza.²⁵ This marked the first official disclosure of the number of detained Gazan residents who died in Israeli custody. However, considering other reports and unofficial accounts, the actual number is likely higher.

¹⁹ <https://www.ynet.co.il/health/article/hyfc11aswr>

²⁰ <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/2024-04-04/ty-article/.premium/0000018e-9ac3-dd2b-ad9f-dadb900f0000>

²¹ <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/2024-04-04/ty-article/.premium/0000018e-9ac3-dd2b-ad9f-dadb900f0000>

²² <https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/2024-05-09/ty-article-opinion/.premium/0000018f-5dc3-d9a0-a38f-fde7ab0b0000>

²³ <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/2024-03-07/ty-article/.premium/0000018e-1240-df16-a58e-1ffedcf70000>

²⁴ https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/05/05/israeli-military-accused-of-torturing-palestinian-inmates_6670502_4.html

²⁵ "Your inquiry regarding the number of detainees who died in military custody." July 3, 2024. The IDF Commissioner for Freedom of Information Requests. The letter is held by PHRI and can be provided upon request.

Based on the information collected by PHRI regarding the poor conditions and insufficient medical care at the facility, PHRI released an ethical medical opinion in April 2023, suggesting that the Sde Teiman facility and the field hospital operating within it should be closed. The ethical opinion was signed by PHRI's ethics committee, its board of directors, and over 2,000 medical professionals worldwide. We forwarded this ethical opinion to the IMA and the Ministry of Health, along with a request for urgent action.

In our letter, we expressed grave concerns about the conditions in which Gazan detainees are held, the torture they suffer, and the ethical violations in their medical treatment. We also emphasized that the actions of civilian hospitals, the field hospital, and the Ministry of Health's treatment guidelines for Sde Teiman all contribute to these severe violations. We called for the closure of the facility and urged the IMA to take proactive steps to help end these practices, which amount to torture. We also requested that IMA ensure proper conditions for all detained individuals, in line with international conventions and that those requiring medical care at Sde Teiman be transferred to a facility that adheres to medical ethics. We called on the IMA to take responsibility and address the severe ethical conflict faced by its members who are forced to violate medical ethics.²⁶ Although the IMA acknowledged receiving PHRI's letter, no response to these concerns has been provided to date.

Soon after, Dr. Yossef Walfisch, chairperson of the IMA's Ethics Board, published an article on the DoctorsOnly website, as well as an official letter addressed to Israeli physicians. Neither the article nor the letter referred to the detained Palestinians as "patients." Instead, Dr. Walfisch labeled them " Hamas terrorists," as though they had already been tried and convicted. This severely violates the core principle of medical ethics, which mandates maintaining medical neutrality.

Concerning the Sde Teiman facility, Dr. Walfisch remarked that "staff has been informed that their safety takes precedence over any other ethical consideration."²⁷ Although safeguarding staff is vital, such statements effectively justify the dangerous conditions under which medical care is provided at the site. In Dr. Walfisch's view, less harmful alternatives should not be considered, and individual factors related to the patient's level of danger and medical condition are irrelevant. This stance overlooks ethical guidelines regarding the use of blindfolding and restraint—guidelines the board he chairs previously helped establish.²⁸ The World Health Organization (WHO) advises physicians against treating blindfolded patients, and past IMA ethical guidelines have stressed the importance of minimizing the use of restraint. Despite this, Dr. Walfisch has disregarded the testimonies of at least two physicians who practiced at Sde Teiman, as well as ethical opinions from PHRI and various other physicians.²⁹

The World Medical Association encourages National Medical Associations and fellow physicians to "support the physician and his or her family in the face of threats or reprisals resulting from a refusal

²⁶ PHRI report: [Medical ethics and the detention of Gazan residents since the start of the 2023 war. An ethical opinion paper – pages 19-20](#)

²⁷<https://doctorsonly.co.il/2024/04/314672/?hilitte=%27%D7%99%D7%95%D7%A1%D7%99%27%2C%27%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%A4%D7%99%D7%A9%27>

²⁸ <https://www.ima.org.il/main/ViewContent.aspx?CategoryId=18844>, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37459869/>

²⁹ <https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/2024-04-15/ty-article-opinion/.premium/0000018e-e1c5-d4da-a18f-edef9270000>

to condone the use of torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.”³⁰ Furthermore, WMA stresses the NMA’s forefront role in advocating for the Red Cross to be granted access to the facility, as this could have substantial humanitarian and medical benefits.³¹ While the Red Cross remains barred from visiting Sde Teiman, the IMA’s Ethics Board—one of the few relevant oversight bodies—should adopt a firm and clear stance on this issue. Currently, there is a complete lack of oversight of the facility, often referred to as the "Israeli Guantanamo,"³² and the field hospital operating within it. Meanwhile, there are ongoing reports of torture and deaths of detainees, as well as concerning accounts regarding the conduct of medical personnel both in the field hospital and in civilian hospitals.

Hospitals

In mid-March, PHRI received testimonies from medical personnel at civilian hospitals about the treatment of detained Gazans admitted to these facilities. These accounts revealed that Gazan detainees are transferred to civilian hospitals for medical examinations, when specific equipment is lacking at Sde Teiman, for complex surgeries, or if their condition worsens, such as due to an infection that has spread. They arrive fully restrained and blindfolded, identified only by a military number and classified as "anonymous." Israeli soldiers remain with them throughout their stay, and they are frequently discharged prematurely by the hospital despite standard procedures and the need for proper recovery time.^{33 34}

According to these staff accounts, patients requiring care in an intensive care unit or specialized unit are often kept in the emergency room or placed in a side room lacking the necessary equipment, which limits the ability to offer them adequate treatment. In most cases, medical staff accept that these detainees remain unnamed and receive treatment while restrained, blindfolded, and dressed in minimal clothing—conditions that further contribute to their dehumanization that is already the main characteristic in the attitude towards them. Additionally, hospital sources have informed PHRI that consent is not always sought, and translation services are often not provided. As a result, invasive medical procedures are conducted without prior explanation to the patients or obtaining their consent.

Additional testimonies obtained by PHRI indicate that some healthcare personnel have refused to treat detained patients, necessitating their replacement by other staff members. Even among those who agree to provide care, some only offer basic treatment. For example, many staff members withhold painkillers after invasive procedures, considering them a privilege that the patients do not

³⁰ <https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-tokyo-guidelines-for-physicians-concerning-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading-treatment-or-punishment-in-relation-to-detention-and-imprisonment/#:~:text=The%20physician%20shall%20not%20countenance,and%20in%20all%20situations%2C%20including>

³¹ <https://www.wma.net/what-we-do/campaigns/health-care-in-danger/>

³² <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/2024-04-21/ty-article/.premium/close-israels-guantanamo-bay/0000018e-fd2c-de5a-a9ef-ff7d90fd0000>

³³ <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/2024-03-11/ty-article/.premium/0000018e-2d48-d682-a9df-edecbaec0000>

³⁴ <https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/2024-05-09/ty-article-opinion/.premium/0000018f-5dc3-d9a0-a38f-fde7ab0b0000>

deserve. Additionally, some staff members justify providing medical treatment solely to keep the patients alive for the purpose of interrogation by Israeli security forces.³⁵

Such positions contradict medical ethics and align with the systemic ethical violations currently occurring in Israeli health facilities, with the Minister of Health's backing. These conditions contribute to the significant gaps in the medical care provided in public hospitals. The standard of care for Gazan detainees is markedly below accepted norms and frequently breaches established protocols and ethical guidelines.

Israel Prison Service (IPS)

Even before the war began, there was a clear decline in conditions for Palestinians held in Israeli incarceration facilities. This deterioration was evident through legislative changes, increasingly harsh IPS practices, the worsening of conditions as a part of IPS conduct or policy, the neglect or even endorsement of violent behavior, and various public statements by policymakers and officials. Since the war's onset, the situation for detained and incarcerated Palestinians has significantly worsened. Arbitrary punishment, torture, and human rights abuses, including severe violations of the right to health, have now become a matter of policy.

Medical care in IPS facilities is administered within prison clinics. Specialist care is either delivered by hospital physicians who visit the prisons or through transferring incarcerated individuals to hospitals for specialized treatment. The IPS also operates one medical center - the IPS Medical Center, which is designed for individuals with complex medical conditions requiring intensive medical supervision. The physicians and medics in the prison clinics are IPS employees and are not part of the IMA or any other professional healthcare association, with the exception of Dr. Liav Goldstein, the IPS Chief Medical Officer, who is a member of the IMA.

Following the outbreak of the war, the IPS enforced a lockdown on all Palestinians in Israeli prisons, accompanied by widespread violence from IPS guards, which was endorsed by Israeli decision makers and officials. The lockdown involved numerous restrictions, including the suspension of family visits, limited access to attorneys, denial of Red Cross visits, confiscation of personal belongings, restrictions on water and electricity usage, and reduced access to the prison yard. Additionally, Palestinians are held in severely overcrowded conditions, with many forced to sleep on mattresses on the floor, receiving insufficient and low-quality food, and having minimal to no access to medical care. As a result, hundreds of sick and injured individuals remain in prison without adequate medical attention and in deteriorating health. These serious breaches of professional and ethical standards have persisted with little objection from either the judicial system or the medical community. Meanwhile, the recent surge in prison deaths underscores the disturbing scale of neglect, abuse, and brutality.³⁶

³⁵ PHRI report: [Medical ethics and the detention of Gazan residents since the start of the 2023 war, An ethical opinion paper – page 9](#)

³⁶ For further reading: PHRI Report: [Systemic violations of human rights: The incarceration conditions of Palestinians in Israel since October 7](#)

Since the IPS imposed its lockdown, hundreds of Palestinians in Israeli prisons have reported being denied access to medical care, with scheduled medical procedures outside the prison being canceled. In the first six months of the war, aside from a few chronically ill patients, Palestinians in incarceration were not allowed to visit medical clinics or be examined by prison physicians.

After reaching out to IPS Chief Medical Officer Dr. Goldstein numerous times, PHRI sent a letter to IMA Ethics Board Chair Dr. Walfisch on November 23, 2023. The letter urged the IMA to take immediate action in light of the threat to the lives of Palestinians in IPS facilities. PHRI detailed the torture and harsh restrictions Palestinians face in Israeli prisons, stressing that access to medical care is being obstructed—including prevention of visits to prison clinics, forbidding of attending specialist appointments, and cancellations of referrals to hospitals.

A few days later, on November 28, Dr. Walfisch responded with a vague reply, stating:

“Based on my inquiries, the issues raised in your letter have been addressed by the High Court. Furthermore, an inquiry with the IPS Chief Medical Officer confirmed that the treatment of all incarcerated individuals, both in security and non-security wings, aligns with medical ethics guidelines. The Ethics Board sees no reason to pursue the matter further.”

It is important to note that the High Court dismissed PHRI's petitions regarding the conditions of Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including the denial of medical treatment, despite the numerous testimonies submitted.

On December 13, 2023, PHRI contacted Dr. Goldstein regarding the health services available in prisons since the beginning of the war. We addressed the suspension of specialist clinic activities and the difficulties incarcerated individuals face in obtaining hospital appointments and procedures. Additionally, we referenced a series of communications with the IPS regarding its medical system, including earlier responses received from Dr. Goldstein.

Among the correspondences from Dr. Goldstein is one dated October 22, 2023, where he clarified that specialist care is not being provided in prisons due to many physicians being drafted for reserve military duty. In a separate response received the same day, he indicated that all procedures for the patient referenced in the letter had been canceled because of the security situation, including an eye test and a pre-op examination. Palestinians in prison reported being unable to access the medical clinic, noting that the only medical professional available to them is the medic assigned to their wing.

Based on various medical records from those months, it appears that chronically ill patients, who are usually monitored weekly, had not been examined since the war began. Additionally, numerous testimonies from recently arrested Palestinians—whom we either visited in prison or spoke with after their release—described grim conditions in Israeli prisons. These accounts indicate that detained Palestinians with injuries and medical conditions requiring ongoing care and close monitoring did not have access to medical professionals for days or even weeks. Testimonies from Palestinians held under both criminal and security charges suggest that many planned treatments had been postponed, scheduled procedures at external facilities had been delayed, and appointments with specialists had been canceled. According to instructions from the IPS

commissioner, the transfer of "security prisoners in need of medical treatment to hospitals has nearly ceased, except in exceptional cases."³⁷

Another medical file we obtained documented an incarcerated Palestinian with a chronic lung condition who had been waiting for months to see a specialist after his condition worsened. The file noted that he was "scheduled to see a lung specialist, but the appointment was postponed due to new Health Ministry guidelines following the Iron Swords War." Two months later, he had still not seen a specialist, even though hospitals had returned to normal operations.

PHRI's letter to Dr. Goldstein dated December 13, 2023, requested clarification on several issues: whether the prison specialist clinics will resume operations; whether incarcerated individuals, including those classified as "security prisoners," can access medical examinations and appointments outside of IPS facilities; how many patients have been able to leave for medical appointments in the past six months; whether new appointments have been scheduled for those who missed theirs; if medical examinations are conducted during prison intake and within what timeframe; if chronic patients are regularly screened and tested in prison clinics; and whether psychiatrists visit the prisons.

A response was finally received two months later, on February 28, after an attorney representing PHRI sent a warning letter before initiating a court appeal. The response was again vague and failed to address most of the questions posed. Dr. Goldstein stated that "routine medical care inside the prisons is provided based on need and urgency, and incarcerated individuals receive care from the relevant medical authorities within the prisons."

He also asserted that "the IPS is committed to ensuring the health of all incarcerated individuals, as mandated by the Israeli Prisons Ordinance, both in routine times and emergencies." Dr. Goldstein further explained that "due to the war, some routine services were canceled or postponed by hospitals and health centers, partly because physicians were called to military reserve duty and due to reduced activity in community healthcare." He concluded by noting that "recently, most medical centers have resumed routine operations, and accordingly, appointments have been rescheduled, based on medical needs, urgency, and the scheduling coordinated by the public healthcare system."

On December 25, 2023, PHRI contacted Dr. Boaz Lev, the Public Complaints Commissioner at the Ministry of Health, as well as Dr. Wolfisch, with a copy also sent to Dr. Hagar Mizrahi, Head of the General Medicine Division at the Ministry of Health. We called for an investigation into misconduct related to the treatment of "A.S.," a 20-year-old Palestinian from the West Bank who was arrested on October 9, 2023. During his arrest, he was shot in the left thigh and subsequently hospitalized for four days, during which he underwent surgery to repair his hip with a platinum implant.

A.S. reported being severely assaulted in the hospital by the soldiers guarding him, one of whom filmed the incident. He was restrained by his hands and legs throughout his hospitalization. A.S. also recounted that the soldiers strangled him with a pillow and struck his injured hip. On the fourth day, he was attacked by rioting civilians who stormed the hospital. Later that same day, police officers who came to take his statement about the assault also attacked him, slapping him several times.

³⁷ <https://www.maariv.co.il/news/law/Article>

A.S. believes that the violence inflicted by the soldiers, police, and civilians during his hospital stay further compromised his health.

He was then transferred to the IPS Medical Center, where he also faced harsh conditions and violence from guards. A.S. was kept in isolation for several days and provided with what he described as inedible food. Upon arrival at the medical center, an X-ray was taken of his leg. Two weeks later, a prison physician informed him that he would need another surgery, but it could not be performed due to the ongoing war. He was not given any information about a possible future appointment.

An attorney who visited A.S. on behalf of PHRI on November 26, 2023, reported that A.S. had gone over 20 days without any medication, leading to a possible infection at the surgical site. He had also not been examined by a physician during this period. A.S. reported severe pain, especially at night and when moving. Although he uses crutches, his requests to have his bandages replaced to maintain cleanliness at the surgery site were denied.

On January 18, 2024, we received a response to these concerns from Dr. Walfisch. He stated that "an inquiry with Dr. Liav Goldstein, the IPS Chief Medical Officer, confirmed that IPS physicians treated [A.S.] in accordance with medical ethics guidelines." He also noted that "the [IMA] Ethics Board is concerned solely with the conduct of physicians and does not address the behavior of civilians." Additionally, he mentioned that "in our experience with IPS, the medical care provided by its physicians is professional and adheres to medical ethics." To date, no response has been received from the Ministry of Health.

PHRI continues to monitor the medical care that the IPS provides to A.S. According to his medical file, which PHRI received from the IPS in December, the recommended surgery did not occur. When PHRI inquired about this, the IPS stated that a new appointment had been scheduled for March. However, when March came, A.S. was not permitted to leave prison. It was not until May—seven months after the initial recommendation for surgery—that the first phase of the procedure was finally carried out. A.S. is currently waiting for the subsequent phases of the procedure, which have also been postponed.

Another example of inadequate medical care involves 50-year-old A.H., a cancer patient who had previously received hormone and radiation treatments and was under oncological observation. In August 2023, a PET CT scan revealed high-intensity uptake in lytic lesions in two new areas. By September, it was determined that he should start radiation therapy as soon as possible, and he exited prison for a medical test in preparation for the treatment. However, when it was time to commence the therapy, he was informed that, due to the war, no medical leaves would be permitted. In December 2023, PHRI contacted the IPS Chief Medical Officer to request that A.H. be allowed to leave for treatment. A response was not received until February 2024, which stated that A.H. had left for radiation treatment in January, more than 90 days after the treatment was initially scheduled to begin. PHRI also sent a copy of this inquiry to the Public Complaints Commissioner at the Ministry of Health, but no response has been received.

The harming of Palestinian health in Israeli prisons, along with the denial of medical care and the effective shutdown of all previously available healthcare services, not only jeopardizes their well-being but also poses a direct threat to their lives. At least 15 Palestinians have died in IPS facilities, and 44 others in military custody. PHRI volunteer physicians participated in the autopsies of five

Palestinians who died in IPS custody, representing the deceased's families (In other cases, autopsies were conducted without informing the families, or hasn't performed yet). At least two of these autopsies clearly indicated that violence had been inflicted, while two others revealed evidence of medical neglect.

One such case is that of Mohammad Zabar, who died in prison at the age of 21 in February 2024. He was born with Hirschsprung's disease, a condition that required him to follow a special diet and receive treatment if his condition worsened—information that was known to the IPS.

A PHRI physician who took part in the autopsy reported that Zabar died after being deprived of the necessary diet and instead given food that caused severe constipation for weeks. As his condition worsened, he did not receive the required treatment. By the time he was finally transferred to a hospital, it was already too late, and his death was declared. To date, none of the official final autopsy reports have been published, including those for deaths that occurred in October.

Another case is that of Abed Elrahman Bahash, who was 23 years old when he died in Megiddo prison in late December 2023. His autopsy revealed signs of violence, including fractures in the right ribs, a ruptured spleen, and multiple hematomas. It also showed that Bahash suffered from severe necrotizing pneumonia in both lungs, with the right lung completely collapsed due to an accumulation of infected fluid. A PHRI physician who attended the autopsy suggested that a staphylococcus aureus or streptococcus pneumonia infection likely caused the necrotizing pneumonia. He also observed that, given the condition of the lungs and the fluid accumulation, it seems Bahash had gone without medical treatment for a prolonged period.

Summary

Since the start of the war, PHRI has been dealing with hundreds of cases of medical neglect within the IPS system. These cases involve the postponement of medical appointments, both by hospitals and the IPS medical department. Postponements are also occurring in cases involving diabetes, cancer, thyroidectomy, and other chronic diseases, leaving patients without proper monitoring and follow-up.

More than ten months into the war, conditions in Israeli prisons have deteriorated significantly, particularly regarding medical neglect. Although some patients may withstand months of neglect and delayed treatment, the risks escalate over time. This is evident from the fact that most individuals who have died in custody since February had chronic illnesses.

Furthermore, the harsh conditions imposed by the IPS complicate the treatment of diseases. Since March 2024, PHRI has been working on hundreds of cases of Palestinians in Israeli prisons suffering from skin conditions, particularly scabies. This issue stems directly from their overcrowded confinement on mattresses on the floor, insufficient clothing, and the absence of hygiene facilities and products. Consequently, a significant portion of the prison population has been infected, with some individuals reporting reinfection even after recovery.

As detailed in this report, PHRI has repeatedly urged the Health Ministry and the IMA to take active measures to address the conditions at the field hospital at Sde Teiman, the ethical breaches in

civilian hospitals, and the medical care in IPS facilities. Despite PHRI's appeals, these bodies refuse to ensure proper medical care is provided and the health and lives of Palestinians in Israeli prisons are protected. They also fail to defend medical ethics or the physicians who are forced to participate in ethical violations, inhumane treatment, and torture. In effect, they enable the harsh standards established for treating Palestinians in prisons and the severe misconduct of medical staff, which undermine professional values and medical ethics.

Under the current conditions, we must regard the Health Ministry and the IMA as complicit in the abuses against Palestinians in Israeli custody, alongside the IPS, Israeli courts, military, investigative bodies, and other authorities. We urge global health organizations, especially physicians' associations, to actively work towards ending these abuses. This includes making direct appeals and issuing public statements to condemn the policies of torture, abuse, neglect, and negligence that threaten human life. We call on you to help hold Israel accountable and end these grave violations by taking the following actions:

1. Advocate for the entry of international organizations, such as the Red Cross, into Israeli prison facilities to document relevant incidents and provide medical care to incarcerated individuals.
2. Contact the IMA and the Israeli Ministry of Health, both privately and publicly, to address their involvement in the aforementioned violations. It is unacceptable for an organization implicated in such abuses to be part of the global medical community.
3. Urge the WMA to evaluate whether the IMA adheres to its principles.
4. Call on relevant professional organizations to take action to end the systematic violations of Palestinian rights in Israeli prisons, including the participation of healthcare workers in these abuses.