

## COVID-19 crisis in the Occupied Palestinian territory

Brussels, 1 April 2020

***ACT Alliance EU and CIDSE are alarmed about the humanitarian impact of COVID-19 outbreak in the Occupied Palestinian territory and join their longstanding local partners in a call for increased international support.***

A COVID-19 outbreak in the West Bank and Gaza will have critical humanitarian implications. The Palestinian health system is already fragile – and has a severe shortage of the most urgent equipment necessary for containing the spread of COVID-19 and its treatment, which is mainly a consequence of occupation related restrictions.

Overcrowded areas and refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza are under particularly high risk from a spread of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

The situation in Gaza is of grave concern. Due to the severe implications of the Israeli blockade of the Strip and due to the lack of Palestinian political unity, Gaza's healthcare system is in a desperate state. It is particularly ill-equipped to handle a COVID-19 outbreak and cater to the needs of its nearly 2 million inhabitants in view of serious shortage of staff, infrastructure, equipment and medicine crucial for containment and treatment of COVID-19 cases. Currently, Gaza's maximum capacity is about 70 ICU beds.<sup>2</sup> According to WHO, Gaza has around 50-60 ventilators for adults, and would not be able to handle hundreds of cases.<sup>3</sup> Mental and psychological effects as well as a risk of increased domestic violence are equally alarming.

In the West Bank, settler violence as well as demolitions and confiscations of humanitarian aid continue despite general movement restrictions to contain the spread of COVID-19. This includes recently confiscated tents designated for a clinic in the Northern Jordan Valley, and two demolished residential homes in al-Muntar outside Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> Demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian property and humanitarian aid, which have been exacerbating residents' insecurity now pose additional drastic consequences in the face of current COVID-19 crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> [COVID-19 Emergency Situation Report 1](#), UN OCHA OPT (24 March 2020)

<sup>2</sup> [Corona in the Gaza Strip - Only 70 ICU Beds Available](#), Physicians for Human Rights - Israel (25 March 2020)

<sup>3</sup> [Seven new cases of coronavirus emerge in Gaza Strip, bringing total to nine](#), the Times of Israel (26 March 2020)

<sup>4</sup> [During the Coronavirus crisis, Israel confiscates tents designated for clinic in the Northern West Bank](#), B'Tselem (26 March 2020)

In East Jerusalem, reports of continuing daily raids in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Issawiyah conducted by the Israel Police, including false arrests of minors or firing tear gas, are alarming.<sup>5</sup> While such incidents cannot be accepted under any circumstances, this additionally jeopardises public health amidst an unparalleled health crisis demanding strict social distancing measures.

While we welcome significant efforts taken by all parties to address the spread of COVID-19 as well as the latest financial pledges of states, a stronger response and commitment by the international community is needed to prevent a severe COVID-19 outbreak and to mitigate disastrous effects of such a scenario in the West Bank and Gaza.

In this context ACT Alliance EU and CIDSE urge the EU and Member States to:

1. Provide emergency funds to secure implementation of the [COVID-19 Inter-agency Response Plan](#) under the leadership of UN Humanitarian Coordinator in OPT.<sup>6</sup>
2. Urge the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to ensure unimpeded, effective and principled humanitarian access to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and facilitate all needed health referrals.
3. Engage with all relevant local authorities to support an effective response to the COVID-19 outbreak and tackle the already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.
4. Urge the Israeli Authorities to immediately halt demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian property and humanitarian aid.
5. Condemn any attempts to exploit the current emergency situation for a political agenda.
6. Demand lifting all movement restrictions in violation of international humanitarian law to immediately facilitate the necessary response to COVID-19 in the Gaza Strip.

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<sup>5</sup> [Abuse of Palestinians overrides fear of COVID-19](#), B'Tselem (19 March 2020)

<sup>6</sup> [Coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Update 15](#), WHO OPT (28 March 2020)