



**Caritas Jerusalem reaches out to  
cancer and dialysis patients from Gaza and the West Bank in Jerusalem  
for the holiday season**

December 20 2007 – Jerusalem – On December 18, Caritas Jerusalem reached out to sixty patients from Gaza and the West Bank undergoing cancer and dialysis treatment at the Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem.

**Cancer patients from Gaza**

The patients in question are divided into two groups. The cancer patients are all from Gaza and come to the hospital to undergo chemotherapy treatment. Most of these lucky few (that can obtain permission to enter Jerusalem for treatment) come to the hospital under a special permit and they are not allowed to leave the premises.



**One of the rooms the hospital provides for the cancer patients  
(Photo: Caritas Jerusalem)**

These patients come to receive chemotherapy treatments that often last some 45 days. Unfortunately, these 30 cases are forced to “live” in two small rooms with some 15 persons in each one.

These patients arrive from Gaza via the Erez crossing and come to the hospital by bus. After arriving, they immediately begin their

treatments. There is no room for accompanying family members, so they undergo their treatments alone “living” in a room often with complete strangers. Women and men are often separated by simple sheets to help give some semblance of privacy, preserve dignity and adhere to local cultural norms

Chemotherapy is, of course, a highly stressful and exhausting process with many

negative side effects and these patients generally do not have the blessing to undergo it with the accompaniment of a loved one near by. Our social worker was overwhelmed by the expressions of joy and happiness of the patients, who as a stranger no less, was coming to show them some small expression of human compassion.

The women who are undergoing cancer treatments suffer the most. Many have undergone single or double mastectomies, seen their cancer, which went into remission, return and now they are coming for another life saving treatment. These women face massive depression, miss their families and some feel they are on death's door. They face their cancer treatments totally alone.



**Imm Halil, a Christian from Gaza, wears a traditional head covering because she has lost all of her hair from the chemotherapy treatment. She cannot leave the hospital to go to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (as short three kilometer trip by car). (Photo: Caritas Jerusalem)**

Most of these women are married and have families and children. They miss their families immensely facing their illnesses a whole world away from Gaza. Now it is Christmas and the feast of Al Adha and while most families will be spending these times with their families, these women, Christians and Muslims, will be living in the hospital trying to beat cancer.

For most of these people also there are no extras. Gaza is massively impoverished so they do not come for the treatment with much money to buy things. They do not have money for a phone call or an emergency. They have food from the hospital, but that is about all.



**Caritas Jerusalem prepared a small package for these patients to help make their hospital stay easier. (Photo: Caritas Jerusalem)**

more dignity as they stay for a long treatment as they are not able to bring much with them from Gaza.

### **Our actions in support of these cancer patients**

To help these patients, we provided them with a care package containing a change of clothing (athletic training suit), two t-shirts, toothpaste and brush, soap for personal hygiene, and two towels. We just wanted to express our solidarity with them and try to allow them a little



**Women from Gaza all suffering from cancer (Photo: Caritas Jerusalem)**

center in Gaza, we can help to facilitate needed things, phone calls and contacts for emergency purposes. They know that there is the helping hand of Caritas ready to do what we can to accompany them in their hour of need.

This small package is not all we give them. We inform them about Caritas Jerusalem and our work through our Social Service Department. We let them know that they are not alone and that if they need something while they are undergoing their treatment that we will be there to accompany them. Through our project coordinator and medical

This intervention is made possible through our partners that support our Social Service Department whose activities on behalf of the sick, the poor and the forgotten segments of the population in the Holy Land are an essential part of our work of bringing hope to hurting people and letting them know they are not forgotten. Thank you to our partners who are our lifeline and allow for this vital work to take place.



### **Dialysis patients from Gaza and West Bank**

Kidney failure or those facing serious kidney problems must undergo dialysis three times per week without fail. These problems know no boundaries of age, gender, economic status or religion.

**This boy who is undergoing dialysis received a small gift to brighten up his holiday season (Photo: Caritas Jerusalem)**

Thankfully, the dialysis unit at the Augusta Victoria hospital provides a chance for these patients to receive their treatment while waiting for their transplants, surgeries or just to maintain their lives.



**Dancing on the table is allowed (Photo: Caritas Jerusalem)**

Many of the people who come for dialysis have assistance from UNRWA or the Palestinian National Authority. This for them is not the problem though. To come from Gaza, Hebron, Nablus or Jenin each week three times, is quite expensive and complicated. Most have single day permits only so this means that they have come to Jerusalem and leave before 7pm.

Passing checkpoints, endless lines and waiting are also taxing on their psychological health. Many have to do this for the rest of their lives. Transportation costs and medicines for these patients are one of their major concerns in making ends meet. Every year, Caritas Jerusalem helps literally scores of patients to secure transportation to and from medical treatment because their families do not have the money to pay these expenses. For many of these families, any extra expense quickly becomes an emergency. In fact, very few agencies are available to help in this way, but people know that at Caritas Jerusalem, we will try to meet their needs and help if we can. Often, if we are not in a position to provide support, we will refer them to



**These children from Gaza and the West Bank often come from seriously impoverished families and they often suffer dramatically because they do not have their daily life needs properly met in addition to needing dialysis three times per week. (Photo: Caritas Jerusalem)**



**Distributing the gifts for the cancer patients from Gaza. (Photo: Caritas Jerusalem)**

and strength and they are reminded that they are loved and cared about in their time of need. This is what Caritas is all about.”

organizations that have similar programs or will coordinate with others to try to address unmet needs.

Mervat Naber, the head of our Social Service Department said: “Going and visiting these people in the hospital is not an easy experience, but I was amazed at the impact of this very small activity. Almost all of the women from Gaza wept and we embraced. Just a small expression of love and the reaction was really unbelievable. I wish every person to experience this feeling. Those who helped in this intervention need to know that it meant so much to these dear people, who feel tired, alone, forgotten not to mention physically ill. So true is the expression: it is not the gift itself that really matters, it is the thought that counts.

People gain something from these actions: hope

and strength and they are reminded that they are loved and cared about in their time of need. This is what Caritas is all about.”



**The joy of a child is priceless (photo: Caritas Jerusalem)**



**Two people benefited from this gift. We gave this gift to this woman for her son. In this we are reminded of the Biblical saying: "happiness is like a medicine." (Photo: Caritas Jerusalem)**

These people (and many more) come to us seeking help because they know that our doors are open and we do our best to help them when all other options are exhausted.

This is made possible by partners and supporters of our Social Service Department. You are our lifeline and we thank you for allowing us the chance to help those in the greatest need here in the Holy Land.

**We extend to our partners and friends a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.**

For more information about how you can be involved in the work of our Social Service Department, please contact us:

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Our Social Service Department is a unique and essential part of our work. It is the place where hurting people come to find help. A family who were forced to relocate out of their home and moved to a new area leaving a parent behind who has no permit to move; a person needing a very expensive medical procedure to save their life; a student who cannot afford to continue their education; an out of work breadwinner; those who are poor and get sick and cannot afford the price of an expensive medicine; burned or injured children; the elderly whose families left the country and are now forgotten with no social safety net; unemployed workers in search of small scale support to try to eke out an existence in hard economic situations.