

July 14, 2017

The Victims of Gaza

by [Cesar Chelala](#)

The curtailing of electricity to Gaza conducted by the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah in connivance with Israeli authorities seriously hurts the people of that region. They have become the victims of the political fighting between the Palestinian Authority ruled by Fatah, and the Palestinian leadership in Gaza ruled by Hamas. The PA pays Israel for the provision of electricity to Gaza. However, the PA has decided to reduce the electricity supply to Gaza from three hours a day to only two hours, thus worsening an already serious situation.

Gazans' health has been particularly affected. "The health sector is able to provide only the absolute minimum standard of care –hospitals are being forced to cancel some operations, are cutting back on maintenance, and are dependent on the UN for emergency fuel to run their generators," stated Michael Lynk, UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in the occupied territories. With his characteristic nonchalance Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's defense minister, declared, "We are not a side in this issue. They pay, they get electricity. They don't pay, they don't get electricity." He doesn't seem to realize the tremendous cost Israel's Gaza siege is imposing on Gaza's inhabitants.

Haaretz has reported that to punish the Hamas Government in Gaza, the Palestinian Authority has also threatened to stop providing medicines and baby formula to hospitals in Gaza. This move would have terrible consequences for residents of the Strip, particularly the chronically ill and children, warned Dr. Munir al-Bursh, director of the pharmacy department in Gaza's Health Ministry.

These actions were approved by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, as reprisal for Hamas' establishment of its own administrative unit to run Gaza. This decision was preceded by a 30 percent reduction of salaries paid by the PA to its employees in Gaza. Abbas admitted that he would continue taking such strong measures against Hamas in order to pressure the group, and force it to decide if it will govern fully by itself or cooperate with the PA and end the split between them.

Robert Piper, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the occupied Palestinian territory, warned in June about the tragic consequences on the health and living situation of two million Palestinians if there is further reduction in electricity to Gaza. He asked the PA, Hamas and the Israeli government to put the welfare of Gaza's residents first and to take the necessary measures to avoid further suffering. "The people in Gaza should not be held hostage to this longstanding internal Palestinian dispute," said Piper.

Uri Avnery, a former Israeli soldier and former member of the Knesset, recently wrote, "The uninvolved bystander wonders: how can that be? After all, the entire Palestinian people are in existential danger. The Israeli government tyrannizes all Palestinians, both in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. It keeps the Strip under a strangling blockade, on land, in the sea and in the air, and is setting up settlements all over the West Bank, to drive the population out."

Because Israel continues to have effective control of life in Gaza, it is also responsible for the welfare of its residents, as per to the laws of occupation specified in The Hague and Geneva Conventions. In addition, international humanitarian law and human rights conventions require Israel to protect civilians, safeguard wounded and sick persons, and enable the shipment of necessary medicines. Instead, according to Dr. Munir al-Bursh, ninety percent of cancer patients have no drugs today in Gaza.

Siham is a 53-year-old woman from Gaza and a mother of 10 children. She was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia in 2013, in what was the start of a painful and expensive journey. She exemplifies the difficulties Gazans are going through. “To be a cancer patient from Gaza is to be at the mercy of the occupation. It is being sentenced to a slow death by the permit regime, the harsh living condition, the poverty, and the blockade. We want to live the little time left for us in dignity.”

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Dr. Cesar Chelala is a co-winner of the 1979 Overseas Press Club of America award for the article “Missing or Disappeared in Argentina: The Desperate Search for Thousands of Abducted Victims.”

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