



[Israel Rejects the World Health Organization's Request to Provide COVID-19 Vaccinations to Palestinian Medics](#)

In one of the latest developments highlighting its inequitable rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine, Israel has rejected the World Health Organization's (WHO) request to immediately provide it to Palestinian medical and health workers. Overall, Israeli authorities have been criticized for their unjust vaccine distribution program, administering doses to Jewish settlers but failing to do so for Palestinians living under illegal Israeli occupation in the West Bank. Human rights groups have strongly condemned these actions and outlined that Israel is eluding its responsibilities as an occupying force through this blatant discrepancy regarding who is given access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Amnesty International, for example, released a statement saying in part that the vaccine program demonstrates the institutionalized discrimination which defines the Israeli government's policy towards Palestinians. Ultimately, while Israel boasts of becoming the world leader in vaccinations per capita, it neglects to take into account the millions of Palestinians living under illegal Israeli occupation who have yet to secure their first doses.

The WHO's request for help in providing the critical COVID-19 vaccinations to Palestinian medics comes at a time when an estimated 8,000 of them have contracted the virus, further hampering the coronavirus response in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinian Authority officials have also sought doses from Israel to prevent the health crisis from deteriorating while they still wait for vaccines from the WHO and pharmaceutical companies to arrive, which is not expected to happen until February or March. The WHO's mission to the Palestinians has expressed that it is in the best interest of not only them, but Israelis as well, that the Palestinian population is properly vaccinated considering the regular movement of workers between their territories and Israel. Gerald Rockenschaub, the head of the WHO mission, cited how at least 140,000 Palestinians make the daily travel to and from work and thus it is problematic that "over 1.5 million Israelis have received their vaccines, while on the other side zero have, except for those Palestinians living in east Jerusalem."

Last month, 18 Israeli, Palestinian, and international human rights organizations penned a letter emphasizing Israel's legal and moral obligations as an occupying force to fight the coronavirus pandemic in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as well. The statement referenced Article 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which outlines that the occupier has the duty of ensuring "the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics." Nearly 5 million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are not eligible for Israel's vaccination program, while controversially on the other hand, hundreds of thousands of illegal Israeli settlers are. As such, Israeli authorities have come under fire from all sorts of both internal and external advocacy groups, including those in the human rights, healthcare, and social justice sectors.

As Palestinian officials scramble to obtain COVID-19 vaccinations, which will not arrive until next month at the earliest, a high number of infections continue to be reported in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. New daily infections in the two Palestinian territories have consistently reached into the thousands. In fact, during the second half of December, the average amount of daily cases climbed to around 1,500 – three times the rate from the mid-summer months. Palestinians in the blockaded Gaza Strip remain particularly vulnerable to the virus, as local health facilities have been severely strained since the outbreak of the global pandemic.