



Pattern of Deplorable Israeli Attacks on Hospitals and Healthcare Facilities in Gaza

This past weekend, in the early morning hours of the Christian holiday of Palm Sunday, Israel carried out an appalling attack on the Al-Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital – the largest remaining functioning medical facility in northern Gaza. Not only did the bombing take place on what is meant to be a celebratory religious date marking the beginning of Holy Week in the Christian liturgical year, but it also forced hundreds of patients and staff to frantically flee the premises of the hospital while still enveloped in the overnight darkness. As such, the attack drew heavy condemnation from a host of entities including the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem which denounced it in the strongest possible terms. The diocese recounted the harrowing course of events in their statement, remarking that the twin strikes had demolished the hospital’s two-story genetic laboratory and damaged the pharmacy, emergency department buildings, and a nearby church structure as well.

Regrettably, Israel’s deplorable attacks on hospitals and other healthcare infrastructure in Gaza are far from a new phenomenon, and thus the bombing of Al-Ahli is just the latest in a pattern of this type of behavior. Since the onset of the Gaza War back in October of 2023, international organizations have documented at least 670 attacks of this nature on more than 33 hospitals and 122 healthcare facilities. At the beginning of this year, a report released by the UN Human Rights Office highlighted Israel’s systematic targeting of hospitals and healthcare facilities in Gaza. It also outlined how these attacks had pushed the territory’s healthcare system to the brink of total collapse, while at the same time, providing undeniable proof of egregious Israeli war crimes and human rights violations. Patients, medical personnel, and other healthcare sector workers are strictly meant to be protected under international law, and therefore intentionally directing attacks against these sites amounts to a blatant breach of the laws of armed conflict. The deliberate destruction of medical and healthcare facilities can be deemed a form of collective punishment against the civilian population, which itself equates to a war crime as well.

When it receives condemnation for its attacks against medical and civilian infrastructure, Israel has a track record of claiming that the buildings are used by militants, however, this is consistently not substantiated by any actual evidence. Israeli forces repeatedly use this as an excuse to carry out attacks against innocent civilians and other non-combatants. For many observers, it is no accident that Israel decided to carry out an attack on Al-Ahli, the last fully functioning hospital in northern Gaza. Hospitals and healthcare facilities have been targeted throughout the ongoing conflict, not as militant control centers, but as places for Palestinian civilians to receive medical care, where even there, people are not safe from the heinous violence. Israel’s pattern of such actions has been well documented by rights groups, and despite the outrage from humanitarian organizations and other members of the international community, Israel continues to act in brazen defiance.

In light of Israel’s latest attack on hospitals and healthcare facilities in Gaza, various groups have rebuked it for its actions. The Higher Presidential Committee for Church Affairs in Palestine commented that “The attack, carried out on Palm Sunday, one of the holiest days in the Christian calendar, constitutes a grave violation of religious sanctity and fundamental principles of international humanitarian law.” Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) also stated that “The bombing of the Anglican Al-Ahli Arab Hospital is a violation of the sacredness of life and it is especially abhorrent during this sacred time for Christians.” For Palestinian Christians in the birthplace of Jesus, Palm Sunday and the lead-up to Easter is a hallowed time of the year known as Holy Week, and so it is particularly despicable for

Israel to commit such acts at a time like this. The rapid evacuation of the hospital caused several deaths, including that of a 12-year-old child with a head injury. Since patients were forced to move to smaller health facilities which lack capacity to provide full medical services, this is likely to result in further loss of life, body parts, and could cause long-term disabilities.