

BBC MEDIA ACTION

Gaza Lifeline – War Casualties – Episode 7

Introduction:

Welcome to a new episode of Lifeline Gaza. This programme is broadcast especially for our listeners in Gaza on both BBC Arabic and Radio Alwan, and is presented to you by Dima Hamdan.

Lifeline Gaza provides you with information, and answers any of your questions that are related to humanitarian needs that have emerged due to the war. Those include schools, electricity, water, shelters and dealing with psychological trauma, in addition to a variety of subjects that you yourselves ask to be discussed.

We also feature literary works presented by young men and women from Gaza, who carried on being creative during the war and were perhaps even inspired to write more by this situation.

Dear listeners in the Gaza Strip, this programme is for you. Therefore if you have any questions or suggestions, we urge you to contact us either via SMS or phone us on no. 0595011115. The number once again is 0595011115. This number receives text messages but does not receive phone calls.

You can also reach us by emailing us on the address: lifelinegaza@gmail.com

The subject of our episode today is war casualties.

A man's voice: "In reality it's neither the ill nor the wounded, not even their relatives for that matter, who make arrangements. It's the ministry that facilitates issuing passports to those who did not have one, prepares the needed medical reports, coordinates travel times and the preparation of vehicles to reach crossings".

Dima: That was Dr. Mohammad Al-Kashif from the Ministry of Health speaking about the ongoing efforts to transfer the injured abroad for treatment. The official number of wounded during the war is 11000 wounded and the hospitals in Gaza are not able to cope with this large number. Despite the fact that the ceasefire agreement demands the opening of crossings, but there are still those who are waiting to cross. Let us listen to colleague Mohammad Moshtaha's report. He visited some of the injured at the Al-Shifa Hospital:

Mohammad: Here, in the largest hospital in the Gaza Strip, lay those wounded by the Israeli Occupation. Some of those injured are expecting to pass away any minute, while the

available treatment at this hospital is not sufficient to treat them. They need to travel abroad to receive the adequate treatment. Let us meet Ahmad Shamallakh:

Ahmad: They hit me twice with a rocket from a drone. And now I have spent a month at the Al-Shifa hospital. I spent 10 days in the intensive care, and then I underwent an operation. They have ever since been saying they will let me out. We are grateful to the Egyptians. But they should sort out the crossings. I have a referral ready, but I can't get out through the crossing"

Mohammad: We are still in the same room and we go to meet another case with visible pain and a sparkle of hope in the eyes of those injured, who are hoping to be treated abroad. We meet Ibraheem Arafat, who is also waiting to be sent abroad for treatment:

Ibraheem: I was injured at the onset of the war. The first rocket that fell on the Shaja`iya district. I was hit by two shrapnel. One in my chest and one in my back. After I was hit I was brought here to Al-Shifa, where they removed my spleen and then I was stitched. And as you can see I have stitches on my side and as you know the treatment here isn't like treatment abroad. I wish I could go abroad in order to improve my situation. I'd love to go back to my home healthy. I wish that those with big hearts who have connections abroad would take us abroad and let us undergo treatment there. And get better, God willing.

Mohammad: We continue walking and move to another room. Here is the children's section where little Lama Abu Haseera is lying. She can't speak due to the injury that she's suffering from so we speak to her father Mahmood Abu Haseera:

Mahmood: She was injured in the liver, kidneys and lungs. The worse injury was to the lungs. Shrapnel went into her lungs, but thank goodness they removed the big shrapnel while there are still little ones, but we were assured by the doctors. We are now seeking a referral and were told we should get one in the next few days.

Mohammad: To discuss this issue further we spoke to Dr. Ayman Al-Sahbani, head of the A&E in Al-Shifa hospital:

Dr. Ayman: In the name of God the most gracious, the most merciful. First, the brutal aggression on the Gaza Strip has left more than 11000 wounded and more than 2143 or 2150 dead. And as we said, many of those of the 11000 wounded need treatment abroad. The hospitals were filled to the brim from the first days of the aggression and the only solution was to refer those who needed surgery and minute surgery. We are of course talking about serious injuries. The intensive care unit is full until this moment. Many of the cases need treatment abroad due to the severity of those cases. We are of course talking about a huge number of people. Anyway, the number of hospitals in the Gaza Strip is not able to absorb these large numbers. But this is God's will.

Mohammad: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provided what amounts to 67 tons of medical tools, including drugs and medical supplies. That also equals to 2275 tons of medicine. What the patients in the Gaza Strip lack the most though is the hope to be healthy again and to be treated with mercy.

Dima: That was the report of our colleague Mohammad Moshtaha. And as we heard, many of the patients are waiting for the border crossings to be actually opened, to enable them to travel and receive treatment abroad.

Mohammad Al-Sawafeeri met with Dr. Mohammad Al-Kashif from the Ministry of Health and asked him about how the transfer of patients is organized:

Mohammad Al-Kashif: The cases that are referred are simply the cases that are difficult to treat here, or that need long term treatment such as brain and nerve surgery, bone surgery and plastic surgery, burns and the surgery for the face and jaws.

Mohammad: Which countries welcome the injured of the last aggression on Gaza?

Dr.: Most of them went to Egypt, while some went to Jordan and the hospitals of the West Bank. Some were also transferred to Turkey and we are currently transferring certain cases to other European countries such as Germany.

Mohammad: What cases require travelling abroad and how do you pick them?

Dr.: To be honest there is a committee made of medical surgeons and they choose the various cases based on medical criteria in the first place. They usually include the cases that require surgery, and hence take longer and may require repeated surgery.

Mohammad: Does the ministry cover all the travel expenses of the wounded or does it cover them only partially?

Dr.: When it comes to the wounded then it depends on the will of the parties that are receiving the injured. For example, Turkey covers the expenses of those going to Turkey, and Germany and Jordan do the same. But other referrals that were made through the referral committee are covered by the ministry, who in turn receives external aid that covers its expenditures in general.

Mohammad: How can the Palestinian wounded follow up on their travel and who are the official parties involved in this matter?

Dr.: In reality it's neither the ill nor the wounded, not even their relatives for that matter, who make arrangements. It's the ministry that facilitates issuing passports to those who did

not have one, prepares the needed medical reports, coordinates travel times and the preparation of vehicles to reach crossings. Hence the ministry takes care of everything and the patients don't need to do anything.

Mohammad: Has the number of wounded who left the Gaza Strip increased after the implementation of the last ceasefire and the opening of crossings?

Dr.: There were less referrals made than during the war, the aggression. But there is a number of patients who are travelling to Germany in the coming days and we are preparing for that. We are coordinating with the crossings even under these difficult circumstances to allow all those who need to travel abroad for treatment to pass.

Dima: That was Dr. Mohammad Al-Kashif from the Ministry of Health in an interview with colleague Mohammad Al-Sawafeeri. They spoke about 500 patients who were transferred during the war. Yet despite the facilities provided by countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Turkey and Germany, the crossings seem to remain the main obstacle stopping the travel of more patients.

Dear listeners, are you pleased with the efforts of the Ministry of Health? Do you see that it is carrying out its duties in the right way? That is of course if we take into consideration all the difficulties it is facing at the borders due to the restraints imposed by Israel. Share your opinion on Lifeline Gaza.

You are listening to Lifeline Gaza on BBC Arabic. We invite you to share your questions and opinions through text messages on the number: 0595011115 or by writing to us on the email: lifelinegaza@gmail.com

And don't forget to visit our Facebook page titled: Lifeline Gaza

Before we return to our subject of war casualties I would like to read to you comments of some of our listeners about water. We discussed this subject in a previous episode. The comments are specifically related to the doctors' advice about boiling water to avoid the spread of disease.

We have a couple of contributions. The first one is from Abu Faris Abu Oude who wrote to us saying: "It is easy to make sure that the drinking water is safe, if we ask the company for its license and make sure it is carrying out its work properly. We can ask about the company. It is nonetheless difficult to boil water for a long time if we want to drink it".

We also have a contribution by Mahmood Al-Afghani who wrote us in dialect; therefore I will read it out to you in dialect. He says: "The water isn't even good for washing our hands, not to mention drinking. How can we boil it when we have no gas? Shall we wait for the sun to heat it? I don't know whether to laugh or cry".

Let us now go back to the main subject of war casualties who are anticipating to travel abroad to receive treatment. As we already heard, some of them managed to get to the West Bank and Jerusalem and reach Al-Maqased hospital. I went to visit this hospital and spoke to some of the wounded there.

Male voice: “My name is Wael Shareef Youssef Al-Namle from the Rafah area, Al- Tannour. My story goes like this: On Friday, the day the 72 hour ceasefire started, the Jews said that one of their soldiers was kidnapped, so they started to fire missiles randomly. We fled our house and went out. Suddenly a rocket launched from a drone hit me with two rockets. My brother died, may his soul rest in peace, my sister died, my brother’s wife died and 3 of us lost our limbs. I lost my right leg, my son lost his left leg and my wife lost both legs. Praise be to God. They transferred us to a hospital called Abu Yousef Al-Najjar, but they bombed the hospital, so we didn’t know whether to go out or stay, until the Red Cross coordinated with the Jews. We were all moved to the European Hospital where I spent 4 days in a coma, and then they transferred us to the Al-Nasser hospital where I spent 5 days and I got better. They operated on my leg. Then my father applied for a referral and our referral was to Al-Maqased hospital while my wife was referred to the Hebron hospital.

Dima: First of all what type of operations did you undergo in Gaza?

Wael: They were initially operations to clean the wound. Then they did skin grafting on the leg that was cut off, but it was not successful. So I came here to Al-Maqased where I underwent 6 operations in my legs.

Dima: And when it comes to the procedures of transferring you from Gaza to Al-Maqased in Jerusalem; what were the procedures that you went through? Were they complicated?

Wael: They were a little bit complicated and we were rejected by the Jews. The Red Cross coordinated everything and we submitted the hospital reports at Al-Shifa Hospital who is responsible for getting us out. The first time we submitted our reports they were rejected, but the second time we changed the companion and we were admitted. So we came to the Erez crossings and had some difficulties while entering. They started poking our wounds...our wounds were bandaged and they started stepping on our wounds to see if we were hiding things in there. They put us through a full body check machine and took samples from the wounds. It was naturally very painful.

Dima: Were you able to bring along relatives to accompany you?

Wael: Yes, we had attendants. Each person has their own companion or attendant. I came with my father. My mother went with my son and my uncle came with my sister. My aunt accompanied my wife in Hebron.

Dima: How long have you been here in Al- Maqasid? And can you describe to us your experience in general?

Wael: I have been here for almost 21 days now. The nursing is good and the doctors are fine. The hospital is good and clean, thank God. I thank God that we were sent to Al-Maqasid hospital.

Dima: And financially? This trip from start to end, did you have any expenses? What did you pay for?

Wael: I swear to God that we didn't pay anything. I don't want to lie. There are many good hearted people who come here and gave people money.

Dima: How are you preparing yourself psychologically? You have been here for almost a month in Jerusalem and now you will return to Gaza. What things come to your mind now that you are going back?

Wael: The first thing I think of is how I will walk. I will have to walk on crutches. But I'm really happy to go back to Gaza. I'm very very happy to go back to Gaza and I wish to go back sooner rather than later. Because I miss Gaza, I miss my friends. I miss our house and I miss the people from our neighbourhood.

A woman's voice: I am Dr. Samia Al-Kurd, public relations director at Al-Maqasid hospital. We have received 72 cases since the start of the aggression. Those include men, women and children. Most of them are young people in their twenties with various fractures and amputations. We have 4 cases that have been wounded in their spine, which has paralysed them and there are 3 cases in complete coma.

Dima: What is the capacity of your hospital and are you equipped to receive bigger numbers?

Dr. Samia: The hospital has 250 beds. We were prepared to receive another 100. We opened more rooms, prepared more beds and we can receive another 100 patients.

Dima: As a hospital, what do you reckon will the people who were treated here need the most when they return back to Gaza, from a medical point of view? And also from a psychological point of view?

Dr. Samia: Erm... most of the cases that returned need great psychological help. Beside their physical injuries they need mental support, guidance and rehabilitation to be able to return to their normal life.

Dima: And with this we come to the end of our episode of the Lifeline Gaza, produced by BBC Media Action.

This episode will be broadcast again on BBC Arabic tomorrow at 9:30pm Gaza time and you can also listen to it on Alwan Radio at 11am and at 6pm.

You were accompanied by Dima Hamdan. And until we meet in a next episode, we wish you and your loved ones to be safe wherever you are.