

**Prayer Petitions: 24 March 2017**  
**ACT PALESTINE FORUM**  
**PRAYER VIGIL FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST**  
**24<sup>TH</sup> of every month**

*Every day in the month ahead, we continue to pray with and for our sisters and brothers in Palestine and Israel who have called for an ecumenical prayer vigil across the globe on the 24<sup>th</sup> of every month.*

APF encourages its friends and partners to visit the [APF website](#) and [APF Facebook](#) page often to find, and also contribute, updates, photos, stories, advocacy ideas, and special prayers.

A special thanks to DSPR – NECC Gaza for contributing to this month’s prayers.

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ACT Palestine Forum Prayers

24 March 2017

**Prayer Focus: Health Updates and Health Care Access in Gaza**

An estimated 1.1 million people in Gaza are in need of humanitarian health and nutrition interventions. The health system in Gaza is operating under severe pressure due to the effects of the occupation, blockade, internal Palestinian divide, rapid population growth, and lack of adequate financial resources and shortages in basic supplies. The years of blockade and movement restrictions on people and materials, including medical resources, has led to a serious deterioration in the availability and quality of health services. The population size will grow to 2.227 million in 2020 with very high fertility rates<sup>1</sup>. This would increase the constraints on the health care system.

Infant mortality rate which is a proxy indicator for the socioeconomic and health status shows an increase at 22.5 per 1000 live birth; a worrying increase that hasn’t been reported for decades<sup>2</sup>. Also, still birth and prematurity level are increasing<sup>3</sup>. Efforts should focus on improving the quality of reproductive health services and addressing gaps especially around the perinatal period when most neonatal and maternal mortalities and morbidities develop. There is a need to increase the number of available intensive care incubators. Also, the current shortage in specialized neonatologists, pediatric intensive care specialists and fine subspecialties such as

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<sup>1</sup> UNFPA (2016) Palestine 2030 Demographic Transition in Palestine and What it Means for Development.

<sup>2</sup> Maartje, et al (2015) Increasing Neonatal Mortality among Palestine Refugees in the Gaza Strip

<sup>3</sup> MOH (2016), Mortality Report. MOH

pediatric oncology, endocrinology, pediatric cardiologists, pediatric cardiac surgeons and genetics require bridging to meet the current and future needs<sup>4</sup>.

Health report from MOH and UNRWA also indicate an increase in the incidence of infectious diseases such as diarrhea, hepatitis and meningitis which are attributed to bad sanitation and inappropriate hygienic practices<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, non-communicable diseases are escalating and constituting the main causes of death among the population particularly heart diseases, oncology, vascular diseases and injuries. This puts more strain on the already exhausted system<sup>6</sup>.

More than half of the 11,000 MOH staff employed by the Gaza de facto authorities have not been paid in full for several years. The 2014 conflict added further strain to the health sector, the effects of which are still being felt. Handicap International has identified 2,090 people (1,411 males and 679 females) with injuries that require rehabilitation and 4,385 persons with disabilities (2,399 males 1,986 females) as particularly vulnerable<sup>7</sup>. The prevalence of congenital anomalies which are also associated with disability is at the increasing trend<sup>8</sup>.

MOH, UNRWA and NGOs reported a dramatic increase in cases of psychological trauma especially among children who are in need of psychological support<sup>9</sup>. In Gaza, anemia rates are higher than in oPt as a whole. For several years, more than one third of preschool children in Gaza are anemic, while more than 70% of pregnant women in Gaza are anemic<sup>10</sup>.

Fuel shortage and prolonged electricity cuts has also impacted health facilities and medical equipment. Together with shortages of essential drugs, medical spare parts and disposables, this has increased the need for referral of patients outside of Gaza. The virtual closure of the Rafah border has however had a serious impact on referrals – only 148 out of 1,087 referred patients crossed during the first nine months of 2015<sup>11</sup>. Access to hospitals in Egypt can literally be a life and death issue for many Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, vital for those who cannot be treated within Gaza and who have been denied or are ineligible for access to Israeli or West Bank health facilities through Erez. Of the patients who applied for a permit to cross Erez, 50% were denied and 60% of families who accompany the referred patients were denied also. This creates accessibility problem to health services that should be addressed by all parties.

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<sup>4</sup> See note one 1

<sup>5</sup> MOH (2015), Health status of the Palestinian population

<sup>6</sup> See note number 3

<sup>7</sup> OCHA (2016), Humanitarian Needs Overview

<sup>8</sup> UNFPA (2016) see note 1

<sup>9</sup> MOH (2015) see note 5

<sup>10</sup> MOH (2014), Strategic Health plan

<sup>11</sup> See note 7

## **Prayers**

By your power, great God, Jesus healed the sick and gave new hope to the hopeless. Though we cannot command or possess your power, we pray for healing. Mend wounds, soothe fevered brows, and make broken people whole again.

**Lord in your mercy**, hear our prayer.

Lord Christ, you came into the world as one of us and suffered as we do. As we go through the trials of life, help us to realize that you are with us at all times and that your loving grace enfolds us for eternity.

**Lord in your mercy**, hear our prayer.

Loving God, your heart overflows with compassion for your whole creation. Pour out your Spirit on all people living with illness for which there is no cure, as well as their families and loved ones. Help them to know that you claim them as your own and deliver them from fear and pain.

**Lord in your mercy**, hear our prayer.

Merciful God, your healing power is everywhere about us. Strengthen those who work among the sick; give them courage and confidence in all they do. Encourage them when their efforts seem futile or when death prevails. Increase their trust in your power even to overcome death and pain and crying. May they be thankful for every sign of health you give and humble before the mystery of your healing grace.

**Lord in your mercy**, hear our prayer.

Almighty and merciful God, you are the only source of health and healing; you alone can bring calmness and peace. Grant to us, your children, an awareness of your presence and a strong confidence in you. In our pain, our weariness, and our anxiety, surround us with your care, protect us by your loving might, and permit us once more to enjoy health and strength and peace.

Through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Prayers adapted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.