Press Releases

Two Palestinian Children Die from Malnutrition and Lack of Healthcare in Central Gaza

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Deir Al-Balah, 3 June 2024 — In the past week, Al Mezan has documented the deaths of two Palestinian children at Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir Al-Balah: nearly 6-month-old Fayez Ataya and 13-year-old Abdulqader Al-Serhi. Both died from malnutrition and lack of access to adequate healthcare on 30 May and 1 June 2024, respectively. Fayez and Abdulqader are among the first documented cases of starvation-related deaths in central Gaza. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, over 30

Palestinians, mostly children, have died from malnutrition, with nearly all of these cases reported in northern Gaza.

Fayez Mohammed Fayez Ataya was born on 6 December 2023. His family resides in the Al-Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip but was forcibly displaced to the Al-Mawasi area in western Khan Younis. At the time of his birth, he was a healthy infant weighing 3.5 kg. However, he soon developed breathing difficulties. He died on 30 May 2024 in Al-Aqsa Hospital, weighing only 1.5 kg. His father told Al Mezan:

> “After birth, [Fayez] showed symptoms of breathing difficulties. I took him to Al Aqsa Hospital and the European Hospital to check on him, and he underwent surgery at the European Hospital. My son’s health condition was accompanied by my inability to provide adequate food for my wife to breastfeed him properly. My child's condition worsened, and I moved him between medical centers and hospitals, trying to get him a referral for treatment outside Gaza, but the closure of the Rafah crossing prevented that. His condition deteriorated further, and his weight dropped to 1.5 kg. I suffered greatly and made every effort to find him appropriate treatment amidst the immense pressure in the hospitals. My suffering was compounded by the lack of resources and my inability to afford transportation costs to the hospital and provide adequate food for my wife. I have four daughters, and my only son was Fayez, but God Almighty took him on 30 May 2024 at Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah.”

Abdulqader Faraj Raji Al-Serhi, born on 14 November 2010, had been facing health issues since birth. His condition received regular monitoring at Al-Rantisi Children's Hospital in Gaza City —one of two hospitals in the Gaza Strip specializing in children's care, which ceased operations in November 2023, following the Israeli ground invasion of Gaza. Before the ongoing genocide, Abdulqader’s condition had been stable. However, forced displacement and lack of access to life-saving

medical treatment and nutritious food led to his death on 1 June 2024. His father told Al Mezan:

> “[Abdulqader] used to receive neurological treatment and consume protein-rich foods such as meat, vegetables, and fruits in sufficient quantities and regularly. However, after the [Israeli] evacuation orders, we were forced to flee our residential area in Gaza City to Al-Zawayda, in the Middle Area District, where I set up a tent to house me and my family. At that time, I only had two bottles of the necessary medication for Abdulqader, but as time passed, the prescribed treatment ran out. I tried to buy it but couldn't find it anywhere. I also tried to look for it in Egypt, but the closure of the Rafah crossing prevented that. All of this coincided with shortages in food, meat, fruits, and vegetables. Abdulqader's health deteriorated significantly, especially given the tent conditions and the high temperatures, which were unsuitable for his health. I transferred my son to Al-Aqsa Hospital on 1 June 2024, but unfortunately, he passed away."

Fayez and Abdulqader died as a result of a multifaceted pattern of genocidal acts perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian population of Gaza. These acts include the total siege imposed on Gaza since 9 October 2023, the utilization of starvation as a genocidal weapon of war, the deliberate targeting and destruction of Gaza’s healthcare system, and the recurrent forced displacement of millions of Palestinians. Al Mezan also notes that both testimonies reported above underscore the significant role played by Israel’s closure of the Rafah crossing in exacerbating the circumstances that led to the deaths of Fayez and Abdulqader.

"The escalating risks of starvation pose a grave and imminent threat to the lives of our population, particularly children, patients, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities," stated Basem Abu Jray, Al Mezan’s researcher. "Living conditions have plummeted to their lowest ebb, exacerbated by the destruction of vital life and economic sectors, which has resulted in a stark

increase in poverty and unemployment. Moreover, the closure of the Rafah border crossing and the impediment of humanitarian aid and fuel entry have profoundly impacted the civilian population."

Al Mezan reiterates its urgent call for an immediate ceasefire, which must be coupled with the immediate lifting of the siege and closure imposed on Gaza. The seizure and closure of the Rafah crossing by the Israeli military since 7 May 2024, along with the closure of the other crossings between Gaza and Israel, have had a profound impact, severely limiting the entry of crucial food and medical supplies into Gaza. The international community must ensure that the Israeli authorities promptly reopen all crossings with Gaza and immediately withdraw from the Rafah crossing to ensure the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza and the free movement of people.

Al Mezan emphasizes that, as the occupying power, Israel bears legal obligations to guarantee the delivery of humanitarian aid to the protected civilian population in Gaza. Additionally, Israel must also grant patients requiring critical medical treatment unavailable within Gaza due to the deliberate destruction of the local healthcare system access to hospitals outside of the Strip. This includes hospitals located in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) and Israel.

Famine must be formally declared across the entirety of Gaza. Should Israel persist in controlling and keeping the Rafah crossing and the other crossings closed, and if patients in need of urgent medical care are not allowed to seek treatment outside Gaza, the deaths of Fayez and Abdulqader will serve as a grim prelude to many more casualties. Gaza’s genocidal humanitarian catastrophe resulting from deliberately imposed Israeli policies will inevitably worsen, leading to additional preventable deaths. Urgent and resolute action is imperative.

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