



Letter to the Editor

Urgent call for the initiation of support for forensic medical activities in the Gaza Strip

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Received November 03, 2024; Accepted February 07, 2025; Available online April 15, 2025

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Dear Editor,

The Gaza Strip has been under blockade since 2007, resulting in significant deprivation of resources for its inhabitants [1]. On October 7, 2023, Hamas fighters attacked a music festival in Israel and took several audience members hostage [2,3]. In response, Israel declared war on the Gaza Strip, intensifying the conflict. This ongoing conflict, compounded by the longstanding blockade, has severely impacted forensic medicine in Gaza, prompting me to write this letter to Novel Forensic Research.

While global attention is focused on the urgent needs for food, energy, and healthcare in Gaza, with approximately 35,000 civilian deaths reported, primarily among women and children, it is equally crucial to address the human rights violations occurring there [4]. The Fourth Geneva Convention mandates the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to protect civilians in wartime, investigate human rights abuses, identify perpetrators, and bring charges. On May 20, 2024, the International Criminal Court issued a statement regarding the prosecution of officials allegedly involved in war crimes related to this conflict. Subsequently, at its 56th session in Geneva from June 18 to July 12, 2024, the ICRC published a report on human rights violations and provided recommendations [4-8]. Despite these reports, forensic medical activities in Gaza remain inadequate and delayed due to the challenging conditions [9].

The ICRC is mandated to offer substantial support in forensic science, including tools, facilities, and organizational assistance.

However, statements from ICRC officials confirm that the region's conditions are not conducive to such support [10-12]. The Palestinian forensic medicine system and crime scene investigations, already chaotic and incomplete before the conflict [13-16], now face an unprecedented crisis, with only two forensic specialists handling tens of thousands of bodies [17].

Historical lessons from the Gaza conflicts of 2014 and the Srebrenica massacre of 1995 emphasize the need to continue forensic investigations, including those concerning physical, sexual, and psychological abuse [18-22]. Efficient and timely autopsies, conducted under proper conditions, are critical. As evidence in war crimes cases is at risk of loss, ensuring its security and protection is essential [23]. Establishing teams of international volunteers—comprising forensic specialists, anthropologists, pathologists, archaeologists, and geneticists—is vital for thorough investigations and to address issues of missed bodies or unresolved war crime allegations [22,24,25]. Furthermore, ongoing DNA-based disaster victim identification efforts are crucial for finding relatives of the deceased. Ensuring the safe transfer of autopsy samples (histopathological, toxicological, and biological) to laboratories in countries like Egypt through the Rafah border gate is also recommended for comprehensive analysis [26-28].

In conclusion, the dire situation despite ceasefire in Gaza necessitates urgent international forensic medical support [29]. While humanitarian aid addresses immediate needs, the

CITATION

Dogan M. Urgent call for the initiation of support for forensic medical activities in the Gaza Strip. NOFOR. 2025;4(1):20-1. DOI: 10.5455/NOFOR.2024.11.010



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systematic investigation of potential war crimes and human rights abuses demands robust forensic infrastructure. The current system, overwhelmed and under-resourced, struggles to process the sheer volume of casualties, jeopardizing crucial evidence. International collaboration, through volunteer teams of forensic specialists and facilitated transfer of samples for analysis, is essential to ensure thorough investigations, accurate identification of victims, and the preservation of evidence vital for pursuing justice and accountability. This support is not merely a matter of professional duty but a moral imperative to uphold human rights and provide closure to grieving families amidst this devastating conflict. Expectation from the global forensic community to advocate for enhanced resources and protection for forensic professionals operating in conflict zones to ensure accountability and uphold human rights.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the study.

Financial Disclosure

The authors declare that they have received no financial support for the study.

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