

# Palestine

## Anti-colonialism, health and human rights

A resource developed for the People's Health Movement

Updated 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022

By Layth Hanbali

# Outline

A thick, solid red horizontal bar spans the width of the slide, positioned below the title and above the list of topics.

- Historical Background
- Health and Human Rights
- The Health Work Committee and Shatha Odeh
- The Role of PHM
- Recommendations

# Historical Background

- 1897: First Zionist Congress, Basel: goal for a Zionist state in Palestine
- 1917: The Balfour Declaration: British commitment to a Zionist state
- 1919: The First Palestinian Arab Congress, rejecting Zionism
- 1936: The Great Palestinian Revolt, for Arab independence and against Zionist immigration
- Zionism, in its early days, was clear about its colonial goals
- The British Mandate tolerated and often supported Zionist militias and proto-state institutions, while suppressing natives' protests

# Historical Background

- 1948: the Nakba: The ethnic cleansing of 800,000 Palestinians by Zionist militias, and the establishment of the State of Israel
- 1948-1966: Palestinian citizens of Israel under martial law.
- 1948-present: Land grabs, neglect of services, second-class citizens
- 1967: Naksa: More displacement, Israel occupies the rest of Palestine
- 1967-present: Martial law, settlement-building, land confiscation, neglect of infrastructure and public services, frequent violence
- 1975: UN Resolution 3379, declaring Zionism is a form of racism
- 1978: The first Health Committee forms, rejecting colonial rule and using health for movement-building for liberation

# Historical Background

- 1987: First Intifada erupts, against Israeli colonial rule and for Palestinian liberation. Massive growth of popular organising
- 1993: The signing of the Oslo Accords, introducing limited Palestinian self-administration through the repressive Palestinian Authority
- 2000: Second Intifada erupts, marking the end of the Oslo process
- 2007: The siege on Gaza begins, cutting off basic supplies
- 2021: Unity Intifada erupts, re-asserting discourse of liberation

1946

UN plan 1947

1949 - 1967

2008



# Historical Background

- Refugees
  - 5.7 million registered refugees, 1.5 million living in refugee camps
  - Right of return enshrined in international law – not realised until today
- Jerusalem
  - Explicit Israeli policy to maintain 70:30 Jewish:Palestinian ratio in Jerusalem
  - Discrimination in planning policies, taxes and house demolitions

# Health and Human Rights

- Systemic violence of settler colonial regime leads to poor health
- Palestinian citizens of Israel
  - Live as second-class citizens, with political and cultural freedoms curtailed
  - Poor infrastructure, especially for Palestinian Bedouins in Naqab
  - Restricted access to education and health services

Measure	Occupied Pal territories	Palestinian citizens	Jewish citizens
Life expectancy	74 years	79 years	82.7 years
Infant mortality	16.6 per 1,000	7.5 per 1,000	2.7 per 1,000
Distance to health facility	–	22 km	14 km

# Health and Human Rights

- The Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem
  - Huge unemployment and poverty rates
  - Poor basic infrastructure – restricted access to water and electricity, especially in the Gaza Strip and Area C of West Bank
  - Settlements grab resources from and dump waste on Palestinian areas
- Refugees
  - High population density
  - Poor basic infrastructure

Measure	West Bank	Gaza Strip	E.Jerusalem
Poverty	14%	53%	77%
Unemployment	15%	46%	(Within WB figure)

# Health and Human Rights

- Frequent escalations of violence by Israel inflict heavy health toll
- ~4,300 killed in Gaza assaults in 2008/9, 2012, 2014 and 2021
- >4,000 killed in First and Second Intifadas
- Hundreds of thousands injured
- 2.1% of Palestinians have disabilities (despite young population)
- 40% of men, 20% of women imprisoned since 1967

# Health and Human Rights

- Israel frequently attacks health services and personnel
- In 2018, 369 attacks on health in Gaza Strip, 63 in West Bank
- Israeli forces killed 3 health personnel and injured >500 – UN-commissioned inquiry concluded likely intentional attacks
- 2021, Gaza: Israeli bombing of COVID-19 testing lab, MSF clinic and road leading to main hospital

# Health and Human Rights

- On top of systemic violence, severe repression by Israel and Palestinian Authority of any political dissent
- Most political parties are banned
- Move towards neoliberalisation even of civil society organising

# Health as a tool of resistance

- Popular Committees established to challenge colonial rule
- Parallel movement in health for a liberatory apparatus
  - Palestinian Medical Relief Society (co-founder of International People's Health Council) established in 1978
  - Health Work Committees (which Shatha Odeh is director of) in 1985
- Focus on drawing power from communities, empowering marginalised and politically mobilising volunteers
- These were all banned by Israel in 1988

# The Health Work Committees (HWC)

- Vision for “A Free Palestinian Society Enjoying its Health and Development Rights Based on Equity and Justice (Social Justice)”
- Provide essential services to marginalised communities
- Focus on
  - A rights-based approach to health
  - Community ownership of services
- Significant crackdown over the past two years

# Crackdown on HWC

- 2019: Israeli forces assault and arrest financial/administrative director
- 2019, 2020, 2021: Israeli forces storm, vandalise and confiscate material from HWC offices
- January 2020: Israel designates HWC an “illegal organisation”
- March 2021: Israel arrests HWC accountant
- April 2021: Israel arrests HWC project coordinator
- June 2021: Israeli forces pin notice to HWC offices announcing illegal organisation designation and closing organisation for 6 months
- October 2021: 6 more Palestinian NGOs banned

# Shatha Odeh

- 7 July 2021, 2 AM: Israeli forces arrest Shatha Odeh, director of HWC
- Sentenced to 16 months in prison, \$9,000 fine, and 5-year suspended sentence on condition of not providing health services
- Charged with
  - Holding a position in an illegal organization
  - Being present at an illegal event (a public memorial service)
  - Being responsible for the transfer of illegitimate funds
  - Obtaining funds through fraudulent means
  - Forging documents
- These charges also used in Israeli campaign against HWC, including in a report sent to HWC funders

# Shatha Odeh

- Legal treatment representative of usual injustice faced by Palestinians
- 7 military court hearings delayed for avoidable reasons
- Court proceedings in Hebrew, without adequate Arabic translation
- Shatha only able to attend court hearings via video conference
- Family visits banned during her detention so far

# Shatha Odeh

- Campaign launched by PHM war and conflict thematic circle
- Taskforce established
- Statement, petition, webinar, social media storms



## Israel's arrest of Shatha Odeh is an attack on the right to health of Palestinians

Statement by the People's Health Movement  
July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Sign-on letter requesting WHO to intervene for release of Palestinian Activist Shatha Odeh

July 11, 2021 by Jyotsna Singh

*For the following letter to WHO D-G, we request endorsements from civil society organizations, health practitioners, academics, women's rights organizations, and other concerned individuals*

Click here for [Arabic \(عربي\)](#) [French \(français\)](#) [Spanish \(español\)](#)

To,

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus  
Director-General  
World Health Organization

Date: 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2021

Dear Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, health practitioners, academics, women's rights organizations, and other concerned individuals, are deeply concerned at arrest by the Israeli Army of Ms. Shatha Odeh, the Director of the Health Work Committees (HWC), one of Palestine's major non-governmental health care provider organizations, at her home in Ramallah on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2021.

# Shatha Odeh

- Broad engagement in the campaign from across the world
- EU Parliament question fielded
- Reach-out to international organisations including WHO



# The Role of PHM

- People's Health Charter: "inequality, poverty, exploitation, violence and injustice are at the root of ill-health and the deaths of poor and marginalised people" and demands "demand[s] the **end of occupation** as one of the most destructive tools to human dignity"
- PHM's work is deeply political in general
- International people's health university trains activists in organising, planning and sharing resources

# The Role of PHM

- Long history of Palestine solidarity in PHM
- International People's Health Council (PHM co-founder) history
  - Co-founded by UPMRC, a Palestinian health committee
  - Key international meeting in early 1990s held in Palestine, included visits to health centres run by (banned) civil society organisations partaking in Palestinian national liberation movement
- Asian Community Health Action Network (another PHM co-founder)
  - History of Palestine solidarity and supporting national liberation struggles

# The Role of PHM

- Important recognition of effect of imperialism on health
  - Features of imperialism: militarism, extractivism, suppression of rights in the service of global north capitalist interests
  - Global north support for Zionism links to imperialism
  - Israel is the sixth largest exporter of arms globally
- PHM brings together grassroots organising and global campaigning
- PHM brings together health movements anchored in communities
- Many activists involved in testimony, exchange and capacity-building

# The Role of PHM

- Repression in Palestine has parallels worldwide
  - Philippines: curtailing civil society space ahead of elections
  - Nicaragua: 45 civil society organisations outlawed in one month in 2021, including 15 involved in health
  - England: police crackdown on political dissent
  - Palestine: outlawing of several civil society organisations, including HWC
- PHM recognises role of local resistance to challenge this repression, while also being present and lobbying in the global corridors of power

# Recommendations

- Health justice activists are well-placed to recognise, educate and act on interconnectedness of different struggles against imperialism
- PHM activists must be rooted in needs of surrounding communities
- PHM activists must seek anti-colonial and anti-imperialist education
- PHM must centre the voices of the oppressed
  - Use available resources and platforms to empower oppressed and marginalised to develop and use own language

# Recommendations

- PHM must heed calls for solidarity from oppressed people
  - In Palestine, this includes committing to and promoting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement
- PHM should partner with organisations outside the health space dedicated to anti-imperial and anti-colonial work
- PHM should continue to link members and chapters from different struggles to promote south-south solidarity and organising
- PHM should continue to lend its voice to the oppressed, marginalized and silenced