



**21 February 2011
Joint Press Release**

**Adalah, Al Mezan and PHR-I Condemn Arrest of Patient's Brother at Erez Crossing:
Israel Must Stop Manipulating Gaza Patients' Needs to Arrest them and their Escorts**

At approximately 10:30am on Tuesday, 15 February 2011, the Israeli occupation Forces (IOF) arrested Mohammed Mosa Zo'rob, 28, from the town of Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip, as he was accompanying his sick sister, Hanan, 42. The patient suffers from cancer and the Guillain-Barré syndrome, and Mohammed had previously donated bone marrow to his sister. Her health condition had deteriorated seriously four days before she made the trip to Erez Crossing; therefore, a hospital in Gaza referred her to urgent treatment in the Beilinson hospital in Israel, and she and her brother were granted a permit from the Israeli authorities on 14 February 2011.

Erez is the only crossing between Gaza and Israel through which Israel allows Palestinians whom it has granted special permits to cross. This case represents a continuation of the Israel security authorities' policy of arresting patients or persons who escort them after giving them permits or clearance to pass through Erez, a policy that constitutes cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

The patient and her brother had been granted permits to pass through the Erez crossing and access to hospital in Israel for the purpose of receiving urgent medical treatment. Due to the critical condition of the patient, they were transported to the crossing in a Palestinian ambulance equipped with an ICU on 15 February 2011. As they reached the crossing, the IOF allowed the ambulance to pass through and the patient was transported to hospital by an Israeli ambulance. However, the IOF arrested the patient's brother. According to field investigations by Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, the brother had accompanied his sick sister to hospitals in Israel via the Erez crossing five times in the past. He had never before been arrested. At the request from their family, Al Mezan contacted the Israeli authorities and was informed that the prisoner was being held in Shikma prison in Ashkelon. Moreover, until the circulation of this release on Sunday 20 February 2011, the patient has remained without any escort.

Israel has imposed a blockade on the Gaza Strip since June 2007, which has made the situation very difficult for Gaza patients suffering from medical conditions for which no treatment is available in the Gaza Strip. While medical treatment may be available in Palestinian hospitals in the West Bank or Israeli hospitals, patients have to go through a very complex security mechanism in order to access these hospitals. This mechanism interrupts patients' access to life-saving medical care. Each year, thousands of Palestinian patients endure long delays and/or have their requests rejected for permits to cross Erez, which Israel maintains absolute control over. Moreover, the Israeli security authorities sometimes manipulate this situation in order to coerce patients or their relatives, often interrogating, arresting or pressuring them to provide information or collaborate with them. Israel is therefore exploiting the medical needs of patients and their relatives by giving them permission to pass through the Erez crossing, where they are arrested or coerced.

The arrest of Mohammed Zo'rob, who was previously permitted to cross Erez five times, indicates that the Israeli security forces intended to arrest him before he was granted a permit. This act completely disregards the patient whom he was accompanying to hospital, as well as the relevant legal and ethical considerations.

Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, Al Mezan and Adalah therefore call on the Israeli security authorities to stop this manipulation of the most basic humanitarian needs of medical patients from Gaza as a means of coercing them and their families. The three organizations also call on Israel to allow for unimpeded access for Gaza patients to medical care in Israel and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. They further call for the immediate release of Mohammed Zo'rob and for him to be permitted to stay with his sick sister in hospital.

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