

Violations Against PRCS' Medical Teams and Humanitarian Services

October 2015 - December 2016



Kalandia refugee camp, July 7, 2016

During the fourth quarter of 2015 and throughout 2016, Israeli occupation forces committed blatant violations against PRCS' medical teams ,facilities and vehicles, in defiance of International Humanitarian Law, and mainly of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Such violations are an integral part of Israeli policies and measures against medical and humanitarian missions. They aim *inter alia* at obstructing, limiting and stopping the Society's humanitarian activities ,which would negatively impact the health conditions of all Palestinians.

PRCS' Operations Room monitored tens of such violations during the period covered by this report. They include direct targeting of and firing at medical crews, physical and verbal abuse of medical crews as well as obstruction of and attacks against ambulances in the line of duty. A total of 417 such violations were reported and documented in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the period covered by this report, including 162 incidents during which paramedics and/or volunteers were injured, 147 ambulance obstruction cases and 108 attacks on ambulances.

This report provides an overview of key violations committed during this period. Further detailed information regarding each incident can be obtained from PRCS.

Violations in Jerusalem

During the 4th quarter of 2015, 326 patients were transported from the West Bank to Jerusalem, while another 833 patients were transported to Jerusalem throughout 2016. Most patients had to be transferred from one ambulance to another at Israeli military checkpoints. This is a clear violation of article 1 (f) of the Agreement on Operational Arrangements between PRCS and MDA. This Agreement, which is an expansion of §6 of the MoU and is thus considered as an Annex to the MoU itself, aims at facilitating cooperation between PRCS and MDA on a number of practical issues in the humanitarian field based on IHL provisions and on the Statutes and Rules of the International Movement.

Following is an overview of the main violations committed in Jerusalem against PRCS' teams and ambulances as documented by the Operations Room:

- Saturday October 3, 2015: Five paramedics suffered from bruises after being severely beaten by Israeli occupation soldiers as they covered clashes in Jerusalem. Soldiers also attacked two ambulances with their batons, causing damage to the vehicles.
- Saturday October 17, 2015: Ambulances were obstructed at a checkpoint inside Jerusalem in six different incidents. All crews were ordered to leave the ambulances and were forced to undergo security checks which hindered ambulance movements on that day.
- Saturday October 24, 2015: Israeli occupation forces stopped an ambulance for 30 minutes and searched its crew. The ambulance was transporting a patient in a critical condition. The driver was taken to the checkpoint's security office where he was searched. As soon as the search was over, another soldier ordered him to return to the office again but the driver refused: the office was not equipped with any security cameras and there was a pair of scissors lying around: the driver was afraid he'd be accused of having entered the office armed with the scissors.

- Sunday February 2, 2016: Israeli occupation forces prevented paramedics from assisting two Palestinian casualties. Soldiers attacked the first ambulance, searching it and its paramedics and preventing them from leaving the vehicle. A second ambulance was prevented from reaching the victims. Both vehicles were held for more than one hour.

Violations in the West Bank

Israeli occupation forces targeted and attacked ambulances and their crews, obstructed the movement of ambulances and prevented them from reaching tens of victims. Following is an overview of the main violations committed in the West Bank against PRCS' teams and ambulances as documented by the Operations Room:

- Ramallah, Thursday November 5, 2015: Israeli occupation forces fired rubber bullets directly at a PRCS' ambulance at close range (1 meter), causing damage to the vehicle. Soldiers then beat the ambulance's three paramedics who were covering clashes in Al-Bireh.
- Ramallah, Saturday December 19, 2015: Israeli occupation forces fired stun grenades at PRCS' ambulances as they covered clashes in Sinjel. Soldiers prevented ambulances from moving and confiscated their keys.
- Hebron, Wednesday December 28, 2016: Israeli occupation forces prevented an ambulance transporting a patient in critical condition from crossing the Tunnel checkpoint between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, claiming no prior coordination had taken place. Soldiers aggressed the crew and verbally abused them.
- Bethlehem, Friday February 19, 2016: Israeli occupation forces prevented an ambulance from entering Beit Fajjar to transport wounded Palestinians. Soldiers fired live ammunition at the ambulance and beat two volunteers with their batons. The two volunteers were later on taken to hospital for treatment.

Violations in the Gaza Strip

Israeli violations against PRCS' teams and ambulances peaked during the fourth quarter of 2015. No violations were documented in 2016. Following is an overview of the main violations committed in the Gaza Strip against PRCS' teams and ambulances as documented by the Operations Room:

- Friday October 16, 2015: Two paramedics suffocated after inhaling tear gas fired during clashes in Khan Younes. Three volunteers also sustained injuries in their legs and arms caused by rubber bullets and tear gas canisters at the Beit Hanoun checkpoint. In the northern Gaza Strip, nine volunteers suffocated after inhaling tear gas.
- Saturday October 17, 2015: Israeli occupation forces fired a tear gas canister at an ambulance to the East of Al Breij. The ambulance's windshield was smashed and two paramedics suffocated after inhaling the tear gas. Tear gas canisters were also fired near several other ambulances and two paramedics had to be taken to hospital for treatment after inhaling the gas.
- Monday November 23, 2015: Israeli occupation forces intercepted an ambulance from the Society's EMS Center in Jerusalem at the Erez checkpoint. Soldiers delayed the transfer of a patient from the ambulance to another Gaza-registered ambulance for one hour and a half. Soldiers searched the ambulance and confiscated the IDs of its crew, claiming the ambulance was transporting "prohibited" items.

These systematic violations are taking place in the absence of accountability and of legal recourse and remedies. They constitute a violation of customary International Humanitarian Law and of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their additional protocols, mainly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilians in time of war and the First Additional Protocol. IHL provisions legally apply to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as confirmed by the International Court of Justice and as upheld by the Israeli Court of Justice in several of its rulings.

These acts constitute a blatant violation of article 20 of the Fourth Geneva Convention which stipulates that "persons regularly and solely engaged in the operation and administration of civilian hospitals, including the personnel engaged in the search for, removal and transporting of and caring for wounded and sick civilians, the infirm and maternity cases, shall be respected and protected", and of article 21 which stipulates that "convoys of vehicles or hospital trains on land or specially provided vessels on sea, conveying wounded and sick civilians, the infirm and maternity cases, shall be respected and protected".

Medical missions should be protected at all times. Article 16 of the First Additional Protocol states that "under no circumstances shall any person be punished for carrying out medical activities compatible with medical ethics, regardless of the person benefiting there from". In the same vein, Article 12 states that "medical units shall be respected and protected at all times and shall not be the object of attack", while article 85 stipulates that such acts constitute grave breaches and that "the grave breaches of these instruments shall be regarded as war crimes".

PRCS urges Israeli occupation authorities to put an end to these acts and policies which contradict IHL provisions. It calls upon states parties to the Geneva conventions to shoulder their legal responsibilities and to take all necessary actions to force Israel, the occupying power, to respect international law, stop targeting medical facilities and staff, and ensure the protection of medical and relief teams and their safe access to sick and wounded individuals.

End.