

The Rt. Hon. Jeremy Hunt

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London, SW1A 2AH

19 November 2018

Dear Secretary of State

Re. UK action required to challenge restrictions by the Israeli authorities to life-saving treatment for patients

I am writing on behalf of the BMA (British Medical Association), as Chair of its Medical Ethics Committee, to reiterate our concerns about the restrictions placed by Israeli authorities on patients who are required to travel from Gaza to access life-saving treatment elsewhere in Palestinian territories.

In our letter dated 30 August 2018 (a copy of which is enclosed for your reference), we noted reports by the WHO (World Health Organization) that Israeli authorities had approved only 54 per cent of permit requests made by persons seeking medical appointments outside Gaza in 2017. According to more recent reports from Physicians for Human Rights Israel and the WHO, this figure has now fallen to between 50 and 52 per cent.

The practice of denying exit permits to persons living in Gaza was, until recently, enforced by a directive issued by the Israeli Defence Minister, Avigdor Lieberman. The legality of this directive, which stated that a family relationship to a Hamas member was sufficient cause to prevent patients from leaving the Gaza Strip for treatment, was recently considered by the High Court in Israel. The High Court determined that the directive was illegal.

Despite this ruling, the practice of denying exit permits to residents of Gaza is continuing. Withholding access to healthcare and treatment contravenes both medical ethics and international law, particularly the right to health as enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article 12) and Article 25 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The denial or delay of permits requested by seriously ill patients resulted in more than 50 deaths in 2017. We urge you to take up this issue with Israeli authorities as a matter of urgency to ensure that the health rights of all seriously ill patients in Gaza are respected.

Yours sincerely



Dr John Chisholm CBE

Chair, BMA Medical Ethics Committee

