

COVID-19 vaccines for Palestinians

The *Lancet* Palestinian Health Alliance (LPHA), established in 2009, following the *Lancet* Series on health and health care in the occupied Palestinian territory, is an informal network of Palestinian, regional, and international colleagues researching the health of Palestinians. Ten annual scientific conferences have been held, with 748 research presentations involving more than 1000 coauthors. The LPHA has no representative or political purpose and prefers to speak only via the evidence presented in research studies. In the current COVID-19 vaccination crisis, however, we, the Steering Group of the LPHA, feel obliged to speak out.

Primary prevention of COVID-19 is crucial in all countries, but especially in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with its limited ability to cope with a surge of clinical cases. The Gaza Strip in particular has been under intensified blockade by Israel since 2007, resulting in shortages in medical supplies and clinical capacity.

Israel has denied its status and role as an occupier of the West Bank and the attendant responsibilities for the health of the occupied population, as laid down in the Geneva Convention and highlighted by the UN and 18 human rights organisations.^{1,2} This denial is grossly at odds with facts on the ground, including: the limited control of the Palestinian Authority, involving only 38% of the West Bank, with the other 62% under Israeli military control; the building of 125 settlements on Palestinian land and about 100 outposts, with their associated infrastructure, including separate roads to Israel; the demolition of Palestinian buildings and destruction of agricultural land; the discriminatory nature of water management, favouring settlement communities and undermining Palestinian communities; and the impunity of settler violence. These are the hallmarks of an

occupying presence, with implications for the health-care system and the health, livelihoods, and prospects of Palestinians.

Israel is complicit in the increased vulnerability of the Palestinian population to COVID-19. Israel has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to secure the urgent availability of approved vaccines. We call on physicians and other health professionals to raise their voices and put pressure on the Israeli Government to provide vaccines to Palestinians, including Palestine refugees on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The views expressed in this Correspondence are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of their institutions. The authors are members of the Steering Group of LPHA and committed to supporting the development of research on the health and health care of Palestinians. GW is a Trustee of the UK charity Medical Aid for Palestinians.

**Graham Watt, Rita Giacaman, Huda Zurayk, Espen Bjertness, Gerd Holmboe-Ottesen, Hala Ghattas, Iman Nuwayhid, Jennifer Leaning, John S Yudkin, Khamis Elessi, Richard Sullivan, Rima Afifi, Yousef S Khader, Harry S Shannon*
graham.watt@glasgow.ac.uk

Institute of Health and Wellbeing, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, UK (GW); Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University, Birzeit, occupied Palestinian territory (RG); Faculty of Health Sciences, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon (HZ, HG, IN); Department of Community Medicine and Global Health, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway (EB, GH-O); François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA (JL); University College London, London, UK (JSY); Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University, Gaza city, occupied Palestinian territory (KE); King's College London, London, UK (RS); College of Public Health, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, USA (RA); Faculty of Medicine, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid, Jordan (YSK); Institute for Work & Health, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, Canada (HSS)

- 1 UN Human Rights Council. Israel/OPT: UN experts call on Israel to ensure equal access to COVID-19 vaccines for Palestinians. Jan 14, 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/israelopt-un-experts-call-israel-ensure-equal-access-covid-19> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).
- 2 Human Rights Watch. Joint statement on Israel's obligation vis-a-vis West Bank and Gaza in face of coronavirus pandemic. April 7, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/07/joint-statement-israels-obligation-vis-vis-west-bank-and-gaza-face-coronavirus> (accessed Jan 25, 2021).



Published Online
 January 28, 2021
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)00185-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)00185-9)

For the *Lancet* Series on the occupied Palestinian territory see <https://www.thelancet.com/series/health-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory>

Submissions should be made via our electronic submission system at <http://ees.elsevier.com/thelancet/>