**Close to Home: Gaza knows suffering too well**

By: Mona El-Farra

Middle East Children’s Alliance

December 4, 2017

<https://www.mecaforpeace.org/close-to-home-gaza-knows-suffering-too-well/>

When I read about the destruction caused by recent hurricanes and fires in the United States and the Caribbean it breaks my heart. I feel for the families who lost their homes and loved ones. I feel it deeply, because this is what has been happening in my homeland of Gaza for a very long time.

Humanitarian suffering is a daily reality in Gaza. Nearly 2 million human beings live in a small and highly populated place. And almost half of them are children. Two hundred thousand of these children are in need of psychosocial support because they suffer the effects of trauma. Even children under age 10 have lived through three major military assaults by Israel and do not know what life is like with consistent electricity, clean water, enough food to eat, regular schooling, and physical safety.

For a long time we have had very little electricity — only two to four hours daily. The lack of electricity affects everything, including health services and sewage treatment. It also undermines the already fragile economy in Gaza. And the water in Gaza is unsafe to drink because the unreliable sewage systems pollute our wells. Living in such a hazardous environment affects the health of the entire population and is creating a dramatic increase in water-borne diseases.

But even if we wanted to leave it is impossible for most Gazans. Israel has imposed travel restrictions on us since early 1990. The border with Egypt is closed most of the time. When it is open, just a few hundred can travel, and 95 percent of the population is not allowed to travel via the Israeli border, including students and patients needing medical attention.

Recently my cousin, Sana El-Farra, who suffered from cancer and was in urgent need of chemotherapy, was twice denied a permit to receive treatment in East Jerusalem hospitals. She eventually died. Her story is that of thousands of cancer patients. Others in need of medical care wait for the opening of the borders to travel for treatment outside Gaza. Hospitals, medical facilities and pharmacies in Gaza are lacking all sorts of medication, even basic ones.

When there is heavy rain and a cold winter in Gaza, the situation is even more difficult. The 2014 Israeli military attack destroyed many family homes, and only 10 percent have been rebuilt because of a lack of construction materials. Many families live under tin roofs that barely shield them from rain and wind.

But in Gaza it is not hurricanes and fire that have destroyed our lives. It is a man-made crisis — a slow, on-going genocide. All this is happening while the world governments are watching and providing Israel with full military, economic and political support. It is a double standard for humanity — and a racist one.

Despite all this, it is not the superiority of military power or continuous aggression that will guarantee peace for Israel. Peace will only come through a just solution for the Palestinian people, who have been suffering since the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the establishment of Israel in 1948. Israel’s founders created a myth that Palestine was a land without people for a people without land. This myth justified the ethnic cleansing, which has made my people refugees for more than 69 years.