



MMS Bulletin #153

Inequity in Health Persists: Should Switzerland Be Concerned?

***Inequity in access to emergency health Services for
Palestinians in East Jerusalem***

**Palestinian youth volunteers contributing to
improve access to emergency services to
Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem**

By Mohammad Iskafi

Youth in Jerusalem and in Palestine are facing so many challenges from the brutal occupation and the lack of job opportunities to the inadequate education system and public services, in addition to the lack of youth friendly health services in Palestine. All these factors had such a destructive impact on young Palestinians and caused them to feel disconnected from their homeland and their own communities.



PMRS volunteers paint the road sides in Al Ram's main street to ease up traffic and increase safety. Photo: © PMRS

Access to health services in East Jerusalem is often blocked

The health situation is unstable in all of Palestine but in East Jerusalem it is more complicated than in other parts, because in emergencies Israeli emergency services are required by law to wait for police escort to enter some Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. In addition to that, the Palestinian Red Crescent, which has only five ambulances, none of which has an ICU (intensive care unit) must obtain prior authorization from Israeli forces before intervening at any site in East Jerusalem. Most importantly, during times of tensions, entire Palestinian neighborhoods might be sealed off by police and thus, hindering the access of emergency health services for Palestinians living in East Jerusalem.

Training young people in first aid reduces the delay in receiving vital health care

Due to all these challenges and in hopes of increasing the preparedness of vulnerable communities in emergencies, around 1'500 young Palestinian men and women were trained in first aid and emergency preparedness in Jerusalem over the past 10 years. The **Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS)** has been working on empowering young people to contribute to improving the access to emergency services to Palestinian people living in East Jerusalem until today. PMRS trained young people on first aid in 14 different communities in East Jerusalem to be able to intervene in emergencies until ambulances can enter the location. In addition, PMRS sets up different stations in eight locations across East Jerusalem to ease the work for volunteers. In order to train vulnerable communities on emergency services PMRS conducted first aid trainings and evacuation trainings for 54 different schools across the city.

The PMRS played a significant role in developing the capacity of young Palestinians in contributing to the improvement of access to emergency services in vulnerable communities in East Jerusalem.



Evacuation exercise in a school in Sur Baher. Photo: © PMRS

In addition to empowering young people to be able to contribute to their communities in emergencies through giving first aid, PMRS provides trainings for young people on other important topics such as gender, communication skills and environmental issues.

The organization provides a safe space for young people to be able to socialize and develop their skills. PMRS supports young people in conducting small initiatives to empower and mobilize their communities. All of these factors help, create a newfound purpose for young people, as well as a renewed sense of national and personal identity and pride.



Mohammad Iskafi is a medical doctor who started working with the Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS) in 1989 as a GP in one of their clinics. In 1996, he became head of the PMRS Emergency Programme, which includes mobile clinics and the training of volunteer first aiders – a position he holds to this day. At the same time, he manages the organisation's East Jerusalem programme which puts a special focus on empowering young people as volunteers. He also represents PMRS in the Health and Nutrition Cluster for Palestine. Mohammad Iskafi thus has extensive knowledge and experience of the health situation in Palestine and delivers presentations on this topic and the role the PMRS plays in improving the health situation of the most vulnerable groups, including women, young people and children. Email

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