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AUB and Gaza Health Initiative Hold Second “Justice for Gaza” International Conference

The second international conference on rebuilding the Gaza health sector, titled “Justice for Gaza,” was held on June 20 and 21 at the American University of Beirut (AUB). The mission of the conference was to tackle the challenges of implementing international law in the sectors of health, education, and civil society.

With a focus on Gaza, the conference aimed to protect and rebuild the health sector; protect and secure the future of education and academic institutions; promote legal efforts to restore peace, equity, and human rights; address the humanitarian, social, and civic impact of the war; and explore the role of mainstream and social media in shaping the narrative.

Organized by the American University of Beirut and the Gaza Health Initiative, the conference brought together health practitioners, academics, legal experts, media professionals, and human rights advocates to support the enforcement of international law in Gaza, building on the work done during the first “International Conference on Rebuilding the Health Sector in Gaza” that was held in Amman on February 7 and 8, 2024.

The conference featured an array of distinguished high-profile professionals from diverse fields who served as panelists, moderators, and contributors. Many of these individuals have dedicated years of service to Gaza in education, healthcare, human rights, and other sectors, and have made significant contributions to their fields in Palestine, the region, and the world.

Some notable participants whose expertise and insights were instrumental in driving an impactful discussion included Dr. Ghassan Abu Sitta, rector of the University of Glasgow, head of plastic surgery at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC), and founder of the Conflict Medicine Program at AUB; Ambassador Ammar Hijazi, head of the Palestine delegation to the International Court of Justice; Dr. Mai Al-Kaila, former minister of health in Palestine; Princess Dina Mired, honorary president of the European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer; Dr. Muhannad Aklouk, ambassador of

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Palestine to the League of Arab States; Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, Palestinian political and diplomatic thought leader; and Dr. Husam Zomlot, ambassador of Palestine to the UK.

Day 1:

The opening session featured speeches by Dr. Fadlo Khuri, president of AUB and co-chair of the Gaza Health Initiative; Dr. Omar Lattouf, professor of surgery at Emory University's School of Medicine and chair of the Gaza Health Initiative; and Dr. Fawzi Al Hammouri, former chairman of the Private Hospitals Association in Jordan and co-chair of the Gaza Health Initiative.

Keynote addresses were delivered by Dr. Nassim Taleb, professor of risk engineering at New York University; Huwaida Arraf, human and civil rights attorney, co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement, and organizer of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla; Dr. Mounir Al-Bursh, general director of hospitals in the Gaza Strip; and Dr. Mahdi Mansour, associate professor in physics, poet, and writer.

The panel sessions commenced with "Human Rights Under Siege: Access to Healthcare During Catastrophes." This session delved into strategies for reconstructing Gaza's healthcare infrastructure amidst critical shortages and damaged facilities. Panelists explored innovative approaches to maximize existing resources, including alternative healthcare systems, to provide equitable access to healthcare for Gaza's displaced population. The discussions also highlighted the role of international medical aid organizations and assessed the impact of the conflict on women's health and human rights.

The session titled "Rebuilding Gaza's Health Education Infrastructure" addressed the formidable challenges confronting Gaza's health education institutions. The discussions focused on the destruction's impact on traditional healthcare education and proposed innovative solutions such as online learning platforms and simulation-based training to revive the provision of education. The session also considered the potential of establishing virtual universities in Gaza, emphasizing the necessity of international cooperation to support Gaza's beleaguered universities in order to ensure their continued service to their communities as soon as conditions allow.

"The War in Gaza and Intergenerational Trauma" session examined the long-term consequences of the conflict on Gaza's population. It covered immediate, long-term, and intergenerational effects, tackling the importance of local initiatives in preserving heritage and memories while fostering a healthy and sustainable environment. Panelists underscored the need for managing acute health issues, controlling chronic diseases, particularly cancer, and mitigating the war's impact on future generations.

The session on "Pushing the Law's Limits: Rethinking Gaza and International Law Post October 7th" investigated the constraints of international law frameworks in ending occupation and attaining self-determination for Palestinians. The session reviewed recent international developments, including mobilization efforts in global courts and the issuance of an arrest warrant against the Israeli Prime Minister. Panelists discussed how international law could be leveraged to pursue justice and accountability.

The final session of the day, titled "Interim Funding Requirements," focused on the complexities of aid delivery to Gaza, addressing challenges in providing essential

assistance such as food, shelter, healthcare equipment, and financial aid. The session explored strategies for building sustainable financial infrastructure and restoring the banking system, emphasizing the critical role of international support and donor contributions in addressing Gaza's urgent needs.

Day 1 of the conference ended with a fundraising dinner to rally support for ongoing efforts.

Day 2:

On June 21, the conference continued with the session "When Law Becomes the Weapon," which explored recent strategies to weaponize laws against human rights defenders and international law institutions. The session highlighted subversive tactics used to silence humanitarian activists and the role of technology and artificial intelligence in this context.

Tackling the "Public Health Crisis," the session that followed addressed the multifaceted challenges of restoring Gaza's public health systems, from immediate medical needs to rebuilding infrastructure and preventing disease outbreaks. The session discussed disease prevention mechanisms, hygiene practices, and the importance of mental health support.

Looking at "Manufactured Famines and Long-term Impact of Child Starvation in Gaza," the panelists then analyzed the use of hunger as a strategic tool in the conflict, focusing on the severe consequences for children and vulnerable groups. The session explored the ethical and human rights implications of systematic food deprivation and the destruction of agricultural infrastructure.

Next was the session, "Gaza's Orphan Crisis: How Will the World Address This Vexing Problem?" which examined the unprecedented scale of the orphan crisis in Gaza and the global community's responsibility in providing support and solutions. The session aimed to foster dialogue and action to address the urgent needs of Gaza's orphaned children.

In the session on "Media Coverage and Cost in Human Lives Lost," panelists evaluated the dangers and challenges faced by journalists in Gaza, including censorship, intimidation, and physical harm. Speakers passionately described their personal experiences in the loss of over 150 of their journalist colleagues, as well as the loss of their own loved ones. The session critically analyzed the role of Western media in misshaping public perceptions and the failure of many Western media outlets to uphold ethical journalistic practices.

The event concluded with a closing session that outlined two important forward-looking plans; the first focused on an agreement in principle to anchor the health and education activities at AUB; the second involved the initiation of an international health education alliance to support Gaza's health education system and health services. Furthermore, the speakers emphasized the urgent need for international collaboration, innovative solutions, and immediate action to address the challenges faced in health, education, and civil society.

ENDS

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 750 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 8000 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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