
- West Bank: ICRC urges action over disruption of health services

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The ICRC is deeply concerned about the renewed disruption of health services available to the Palestinian population living in the West Bank. A strike by Palestinian health ministry employees is affecting services offered by government hospitals and primary health care centres throughout the West Bank. The employees are protesting at not being paid regularly since the international community cut funding to the Palestinian Authority, in March 2006, and the Israeli government started withholding tax revenues.

"Hospital admissions in government facilities have dropped to as low as 32 per cent of what they were last year, and in some hospitals it is only nine to 13 per cent," says Eileen Daly, the ICRC's health coordinator for the West Bank.

"Primary health centres have been completely closed as of early May, restricting the availability of vaccinations and the distribution of medication to the chronically ill."

Ms. Daly added that private and charitable institutions cannot meet the demand and the poorer people were paying the heaviest price.

Since 2006, the ICRC has repeatedly warned of the worsening humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. The international community's decision to withhold funds from the Palestinian Authority has had detrimental effects on the provision of medical services, effects that have been compounded by the strike.

The ICRC has responded by increasing its activities but neither it nor any other humanitarian organization can replace the authorities in their role as provider of public services.

It has urged all parties concerned – the Palestinian and Israeli authorities, medical staff and the international community - to take steps to ensure that health services be re-established at an adequate level. (www.icrc.org)