

For Immediate Release



War medical expert: Israel's new lethal weaponry calls for highly-skilled medical expertise in Gaza

Beirut, Lebanon- 17/01 /2013 - New and stricter travel and residency measures by Western countries are preventing Gaza medical graduates from seeking advanced medical training needed to treat Palestinians back home wounded by Israel's sophisticated and devastating weaponry, warned a veteran medical war volunteer at an AUB lecture.

Dr. Ghassan Abu-Sittah, who heads the American University of Beirut Medical Center Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, noted that with European and US medical schools becoming more and more off limits to Palestinian medical graduates, AUBMC's presence is very important and stands to play a major role in the region.

Abu-Sittah, a veteran volunteer in various regional conflicts including the first Gulf War, the first and second Intifadas, the Grapes of Wrath (Lebanon-1996), and the 2008 and 2012 wars in Gaza, was speaking during a seminar titled 'The Wounds of Gaza', organized by the AUB Faculty of Health Sciences at Nabil Boustany Auditorium on January 16, 2012.

"Treatment of Palestinian war casualties still relies on highly skilled professional Palestinian doctors of the last generation who have a median age of between 55 and 65," he said. "This situation represents a time bomb that will go off in 10 to 15 years time when they retire, leaving a huge gap in Gaza's medical landscape."

"The use of new technologies and weapons by Israel in Gaza is creating unparalleled suffering for the victims," said Abu-Sittah, while presenting shocking and horrific pictures of the wounded and dead from the latest conflict in Gaza. "With over 1.5 million kilograms of various military ordnance used in the latest Gaza conflict, ranging from phosphorus to bunker busting ordnance, we are not only seeing a display of military power and arsenal but the politics and intentions behind its use."

In describing the latest weapons used, Abu-Sittah explained how phosphorus bomb fragments, unlike ordinary bomb shrapnel, keep on burning inside a person as long as there are bodily fluids available, and they can only be stopped by the surgical extraction of the fragments. In addition, the concentrated use of such weapons has also engendered respiratory diseases as the phosphorous fumes that are inhaled react with the moisture in the lungs and scar them

permanently. The new generation weapons systems used stabilizing agents so that the phosphorus pellets remain active for longer periods of time.

In addition, the use of DIME (Dense Inert Material Explosives) munitions, packed with a fine mix of 25 percent TNT and 75 percent tungsten alloy (tungsten with small amounts of nickel and either cobalt or iron) that forms a dust cloud that ignites upon impact, hits victims in the immediate range by a micro-shrapnel made up of the highly cancerous tungsten. Bunker buster bombs, designed for deep-mountain refuges, are reducing to rubble entire buildings and obliterating entire families when they penetrate an edifice and explode at ground or below ground level. The shock waves produced by any type of large bomb are most harmful to children since their bodies' high water content results in severe internal bleedings.

“All this in addition to ‘Made in USA’ GPS guided munitions for targeted assassinations, cluster bombs and summary executions,” he added. “The Israelis have been following a scorched earth policy, leveling an area and then moving in, in a landscape of utter destruction, without even sparing schools, hospitals, and ambulances and for that matter UN compounds and vehicles. Even fake bombs and missiles are being used for maximum psychological impact.”

Abu-Sittah described how aid donors and even the local Hamas authority prefer to use their funds in erecting buildings and facilities, including hospitals and up to date technical equipment, which are physically seen and are considered a show of political leverage. “But what is cruelly missing are the capacity building, human resources development and redirecting of funder and local authority priorities,” he explained. “Without experience being transferred and translated into expertise, the same mistakes will be made over and over again.”

Abu-Sittah also warned that the creation of specific war terms, such as ‘surgical strikes’, ‘limited conflict’ and ‘collateral damage’ has had its effect in changing the perceived image of war and conflict. “But the fact remains that people, mostly children and civilians, are dying and getting injured no matter how one defines or describes these military conflicts,” he said, adding: “Regional conflicts and wars will not go away by themselves and we have to learn to live with them as best as we can. We are still not proficient in treating what is occurring regularly in our region.”

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Note to Editors

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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 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the 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 420-bed hospital.

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