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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Council
Subject:	Health crisis in the strip of Gaza: state of play and call for action - <i>Information from the Spanish delegation on behalf of the Irish, Luxembourg, Maltese, Slovenian and Spanish delegations</i>

Delegations will find in Annex an information note from the Spanish delegation on behalf of the Irish, Luxembourg, Maltese, Slovenian and Spanish delegations on the above mentioned subject to be raised under “Any other business” at the meeting of the EPSCO Council (Health) on 21 June 2024.

Information from the Spanish delegation on behalf of the Irish, Luxembourg, Maltese, Slovenian and Spanish delegations on the “Health crisis in the strip of Gaza: state of play and call for action”

1. Background information

The Ministers of Health addressed in the EPSCO of November 30th 2023, an AOB point presented by Belgium on a “Common approach and organization of medical evacuations of injured citizens of Gaza”, supported by ten member states.

The Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly agreed on the 28th of May 2024 on a Decision on the Health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, urging for effective and urgent actions to address this humanitarian catastrophe.

2. Context

Since the start of the conflict in Gaza, the humanitarian and health situation of the population living in Gaza has deteriorated in a critical way.

The number of persons affected by the war who require medical care has multiplied and most of the healthcare infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, hampering the access to emergency medical care. It is estimated that more than 9,000 severely injured people are at risk of dying due to the lack of adequate health care.

There is a lack of essential medicines and medical supplies and the violence against health-care workers disrupt the provision of vital medical services and standard medical care of the population.

This dramatic situation also affects patients who suffer from other types of serious illnesses such as cancer, cardiovascular pathologies, pathologies requiring elective surgery, patients on dialysis or affected by serious mental health problems, to name a few examples.

3. Medical evacuation of wounded citizens from Gaza

The European Commission activated some weeks ago the emergency response mechanism to evacuate children affected by serious health conditions, after receiving a list of children with different urgent health needs provided by the WHO. The Commissioners responsible for health and emergencies sent a letter to the member states asking for a response to evacuate those children. Spain, together with other member states, responded positively offering their capacities to treat evacuated children while others were offering means to activate the MEDEVAC system.

Despite the efforts of the EU and of several member states, the evacuation mechanism is still not working at its full potential, as it seems that there is not green light from the authorities of Israel to make the transfers effective.

4. Proposal

We consider that there is an urgent need to support the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) as a coordination hub to allow the transfer of patients in need of urgent medical care to those members' states that are offering their own healthcare facilities and resources.

Member States should be proactive in responding to the call of the European Commission and the WHO so that a rapid and effective response capacity to the current and future needs can be ensured.

The evacuation process must be respectful with the international and EU principles of children protection, including the aspects related to the accompanying persons of the evacuated children..