



The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem & The Middle East
The Diocese of Jerusalem

Press Release

UNWRA offers an olive branch to the Gaza Ahli Arab Hospital

In recognition of the role that Ahli Arab Hospital has played since the 1950's in delivering inpatient services to refugees in the Gaza Strip on behalf of UNWRA, the UN body charged with delivering health and education services to Palestinian refugees has offered a 6 month bridging contract to the hospital. UNWRA Field Office Chief, Mr Bob Turner, said "earlier this year we realised that we needed to run a transparent tender process for inpatient services, due to the increasing number of private health sector providers that are being established in Gaza – we couldn't just continue to contract Ahli Arab Hospital to deliver these services, even though it has provided a very high quality service for so many years now, and was basically known as the UNWRA Hospital".

Ahli Arab did not win the tender but it has contractual commitments with most staff until the end of 2012, and needs time to transition to a model that is not dependent on the UNWRA relationship. The hospital is one of 35 institutions under the mandate of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem. The leader of this Diocese, Bishop Suheil Dawani, said today that "we are absolutely committed to keeping the Ahli Arab Hospital open, as it is the only Christian Hospital in the Gaza Strip and 90% of their staff are themselves refugees. However, we know that we need to move quickly to help the hospital transition to a different model, so that it is not financially dependent on UNWRA from 2013 and so that donors can have confidence to continue to invest in equipment and programs. We have therefore engaged a consultancy firm to assist with the development of a new strategic plan".

The hospital and Diocese have been supported for many years by development agencies and churches around the world. CEO of Anglican Overseas Aid (Anglicord), based in Melbourne, has been in Gaza recently to evaluate the breast cancer screening and diagnosis program that Ahli Arab has been implementing for the past year, together with the Country director from Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) which also provides significant financial support to the emergency program at the hospital. Ms Coleman said today that "I am extremely impressed with the breast cancer program and it is an example of the type of speciality that Ahli Arab could potentially focus on in the future. My colleague from NCA – Ms Gudrun Bertinussen - and I are committed to supporting the hospital through this transition process, which has been necessitated by the loss of the UNWRA contract to provide inpatient services for general surgery. Director of Ahli Arab Hospital, Ms Suhaila Tarazi, said "we are proud of our long and valued relationship with UNWRA. We invite all our partners around the world to help us stay open and be ready to serve the poor in Gaza, regardless of race or religion."

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