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First coronavirus death in East Jerusalem amid Israeli 'neglect'

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An elderly Palestinian woman has become the first fatal victim of the coronavirus disease, COVID-19, in occupied East Jerusalem, health officials have said.

Nawal Abu Hummus, 78, died on Saturday, said Palestinian Authority (PA) spokesperson Ibrahim Milhem in a statement. Abu Hummus, from the Issawiyah neighbourhood, had pre-existing chronic illnesses, he added.

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The Palestinian Minister of Health May al-Kayla also

announced the registration of six new infections in the occupied Palestinian territories, including two workers from the town of Qatana, northwest of Jerusalem, raising the number of cases in East Jerusalem to 105.

The four other cases were found in Yatta, south of the occupied West Bank city of Hebron, and Beit Annan, al-Eizariya and Jericho, bringing the total number of infected cases to 313, in addition to 69 recoveries.

Since the onset of the health crisis, Palestinian officials allege the Arab population of East Jerusalem has been overlooked by Israeli efforts to curb the spread of the virus that has killed more than 150,000 people worldwide.

Israeli police recently shuttered a COVID-19 screening facility in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan - the testing was unauthorised, they said, because it was only overseen by the PA, and not Israel.

"Our goal is to provide aid to the people of East Jerusalem who are intentionally being neglected" by Israel, Fadi al-Hadami, the Palestinian government's minister for Jerusalem affairs, told AFP.

But meetings with "hospital doctors in Jerusalem, interviews with media calling on people to stay at home to fight corona(virus) - they [Israel] consider these things violations," he lamented.

Earlier this month, Hadami and Adnan Ghaith, the Palestinians' governor of Jerusalem, were arrested by Israeli authorities amid their on-the-ground response to the

coronavirus crisis.

Test clinics doubled

Israel recently doubled the number of its screening centres in Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem from three to six following a petition to the supreme court by a rights group.

The detention of the senior Palestinian officials this month was nothing new - Ghaith has been arrested seven times in two years and Hadami four times.

But this time, the leaders said, they were not asked about political activities but their work spreading awareness about the coronavirus among Palestinians in Jerusalem.

The two officials are from Jerusalem, but due to Israeli restrictions they work in al-Ram, on the other side of an Israeli wall separating the city and the West Bank.

"If I walk in the street the Israelis consider it political because of my position," Hadami said.

Israel will carry out such arrests "until it is cemented in peoples' minds that the city is subject to its authority" alone, Ghaith said.

Since 2001, the height of the second Palestinian Intifada, Israel has closed more than 80 Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem, he said.

And since the US broke with decades of diplomacy and international consensus by recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December 2017, Israel has "escalated the

pace of its activity", he added.

Israel prevents "any visibility of Palestinians in Jerusalem or activity of any kind."

For Amal Jamal, a political scientist at Tel Aviv University, "on the one hand, Israel neglects the Palestinian part of the city and does not invest in it.

"On the other, it wants loyalty from the Palestinian population."