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Israel refuses to let Gaza woman visit sick mother whose medical report says 'Palestine'

Gaza woman refused permission to travel to West Bank, where her mother is sick with advanced colon cancer.

By Amira Hass | Jan. 3, 2014 | 7:35 AM | 25

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Israel has refused to let a Gaza woman travel to the West Bank to care for her cancer-stricken mother because the medical report describing the mother's serious condition bore the heading "State of Palestine."

T., 26, applied on December 17 for a permit to go to the West Bank with her two children, 5 and 2, so she could be with her sick mother. The application was passed on to Israel's Coordination and Liaison Administration (which is subordinate to the Defense Ministry's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories) by its Palestinian counterpart, which answers to the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah.

On December 22, since no response had been received, Hamoked: Center for the Defense of the Individual sent a follow-up request to the liaison administration on T.'s behalf. Hamoked's Omri Metzger detailed the mother's condition: advanced colon cancer, metastasis in the liver and spine, weakness, edema, chemotherapy and a possible hip operation.

He also attached a copy of the medical report that T. had sent with her original request, a report issued by the Palestinian Health Ministry's hospital administration division, with the words "State of Palestine" at the top of the page.

On December 29, T. was summoned to a meeting with a Shin Bet security service investigator at the Erez crossing between Israel and Gaza. The next day, Metzger sent the liaison administration a reminder that T. was awaiting a reply, along with another copy of the medical report. Soldiers from the liaison administration confirmed to Hamoked that both his first and second letters had arrived, as had the medical report.

On December 31, the liaison administration informed T. that her request had been denied. But the letter it sent her gave no reason for this decision, nor was it signed by a liaison administration officer.

Metzger called the administration and spoke by telephone with Maj. Tarek Shanan, who heads the administration's civilian coordination department for Gaza. According to Metzger, Shanan told him the request "was rejected in accordance with the criteria, because the mother is suffering only from back pains." Under the liaison administration's criteria, Palestinians are allowed to exit or enter Gaza only if a first-degree relative dies, gets married or falls seriously ill.

When Metzger explained to Shanan that the back pains in question were caused by cancer, Shanan said the medical report had never arrived. So the next day, January 1, Metzger sent a copy of the medical report for the third time.

Soon afterward, 2nd Lt. Nir Yaron, the liaison administration's public complaints officer, informed Metzger that T.'s application couldn't be dealt with, because the words "State of Palestine" appeared at the top of the medical report. To continue processing her application, Yaron continued, it would be necessary to send a report with the heading "Palestinian Authority."

The liaison administration said T.'s application was rejected "because it didn't meet the criteria for issuing a permit to visit the sick. After receiving additional documents, a decision was made to reconsider the request. After the examination process has been completed, a decision will be sent to the applicant."