

**FUTILE PLEA FOR HELP:
A PEDIATRIC PULMONOLOGIST'S
HEARTBREAKING JOURNEY**

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TO THE EDITOR:

9 November 2023: Just one month after the tragic events of 7 October 2023, 240 individuals are still held hostage, ensnared by Hamas. Their medical plight is shrouded in silence. In the heart of Tel Aviv, a sea of health professionals gathers before the *International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)* offices pleading for decisive action. Among the medical pleas for help is the haunting image of a young soldier in dire need of his inhaler [Figure 1]. Ron needs it to live. I, a pediatric pulmonologist intimately familiar with respiratory distress, captured that moment.

The following day, I embarked on what I believed was the least I could do: advocate for the provision of essential respiratory medications, particularly inhalers, for these hostages who were in immediate danger. Enlisting the support of respiratory societies in Israel, we crafted a plea, reaching out to esteemed colleagues worldwide. The image of Ron, with his mother's consent, became a poignant symbol within our plea. Even a Nobel laureate joined our cause, and we dispatched letters to organizations and leading respiratory journals globally.

As days crawled by, responses were scant. Regretful replies echoed, with excuses ranging from an inappropriate audience to claims that our plea exceeded the organization's scope. Frustration intensified as time slipped away, and the hostages' conditions deteriorated.

A month has passed since our desperate plea. No pressure has been exerted on the ICRC by respiratory societies, journals, or individuals.

Ron's respiratory struggles surpassed our grasp. Last week, Ron's lifeless body was discovered in a suspicious sand burial site in northern Gaza.

Yesterday, I faced Ron's grieving parents. The meeting was a somber mix of sorrow and disappointment. Our efforts failed to garner acceptance or compassion from medical respiratory communities worldwide.

Attached is the original letter we sent last month, a plea that echoed into the void, met with indifference and bureaucratic walls, ultimately culminating in the tragic loss of a young life.

Acknowledgments

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Figure 1. Petition to the International Committee of the Red Cross to assure access to treatment for hostages with respiratory disorders (source: patient's family)



Urgent Appeal for Humanitarian Action – Abducted Respiratory Patient in Immediate Danger

DEAR ESTEEMED MEMBERS AND
LEADERS OF RESPIRATORY SOCIETIES,
JOURNALS, AND ORGANIZATIONS,

We hope this message finds you well. Today, we reach out to you not only as healthcare professionals but as compassionate human beings united by a shared commitment to the well-being of respiratory patients worldwide. It is with a heavy heart that we address a situation of grave concern that unfolded on October 7th when an attack on Israel led by Hamas resulted in the abduction of 242 individuals to Gaza, including children and adults suffering from active lung diseases, relying on continuous inhaled and oral medications for their survival. The situation is dire, not only because of the inherent risks associated with such acts of violence but also due to the potential confinement of these respiratory patients in dark, stuffy tunnels.

Acknowledging the suffering of all humans, innocent Israelis and Palestinians on both sides of the conflict, we emphasize that this specific appeal is dedicated to a unique

and specific population—only *respiratory patients abducted by terrorists*.

As pulmonologists, we share knowledge about the critical importance of medication access, proper medical care, and a conducive environment for respiratory patients. The hostages face double jeopardy—not only are they deprived of essential medications, but they are also forced into conditions that can exacerbate their respiratory distress.

We cannot remain passive witnesses to the profound suffering of our fellow respiratory patients in such dire circumstances. We earnestly urge each one of you to join us in a harmonized appeal, urging the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to take prompt and resolute action to secure access to medicines for the hostages. It is a call to uphold the fundamental principles of humanity and compassion that guide our honorable profession.

We are honored to share that a distinguished advocate for human rights and a Nobel Prize laureate, Prof. Aaron Ciechanover, has joined us in endorsing this urgent appeal.

His commitment to advancing the principles of humanity lends even greater weight to our collective plea for immediate action.

Furthermore, we wish to emphasize that this letter is endorsed and supported by the families of the abducted patients with respiratory issues. Their voices echo our urgent call for the ICRC to intervene swiftly and secure access to medicines for the hostages.

Let us unite in imploring the ICRC to intervene swiftly, ensuring that these innocent lives are spared further distress. We implore you to call upon the ICRC to leverage its influence and fulfill its responsibilities in demanding immediate hostage access.

We encourage you to share this message within your respiratory networks, motivate your colleagues to join this cause, and utilize your influence to amplify our collective plea for humanity. Together, we possess the capacity to make a meaningful difference and provide relief to those currently enduring unimaginable suffering.

Sincerely,

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Prof. Aaron Ciechanover
2004 Nobel Prize
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