

A Call to Action: An Open Letter from Global Health Professionals

Signed By Over 3000 Global Health Professionals

10 November 2023

Now more than ever we hope that everyone can take up the calls to action outlined below. The spirit of this letter continues with those who have signed.

You can add your name to the letter here:
<https://forms.gle/ePBLLfhKtqhaxBtC9>

The world is alight with horror, grief, and rage. In the last 34 days, we witnessed the mass killing of civilians and numerous violations of international law. The October 7 Hamas-led attacks on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1400 Israelis.[1] Since then, over 10,818 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, and 175 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank.[2] These events occurred in the context of the decades-long occupation of the Palestinian territories.[3] This escalation of hatred and violence needs to stop. We can and must do better to uphold human rights, health, and wellbeing through coordinated, immediate actions. [3,4]

The clarion call of the global health movement is to act for humanity regardless of borders or identity. [5] As global health professionals, we strive for health, human flourishing, equity, peace, justice, and the end of colonialism in all its manifestations. We also unequivocally condemn violence against Indigenous peoples globally.[6]

Of paramount importance, as global health professionals we act in kinship with fellow humans. We recognise that “there is no hierarchy in pain and suffering.” [7] Because we are human,

we witness the deep pain and suffering: the Israeli and Palestinian civilians who have been killed or injured are all our parents, grandparents, siblings, and children. We share the call for ‘unconditional humanity’ in Gaza and to guarantee health through peace.[4,8]

In the last days and weeks, we have heard statements from WHO, UN Experts, MSF, IFRC, ICRC and others, unequivocally condemning acts of violence against the people of the occupied Palestinian territories.[7-10] In particular, these statements condemn the cut off of food, water, electricity and life-saving supplies to the Gaza region, attacks on health facilities and personnel, as well as the lack of civilian safe zones and a humanitarian corridor. The most vulnerable in Gaza – including those who are sick, wounded, pregnant, young, and elderly – disproportionately face the consequences of direct and indiscriminate attacks and violence.[11]

The fast rise in misinformation,[12] weaponizing collective grief, polarisation of public sentiment [13] and dehumanisation [14] of people trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of violence distracts the international community from bearing witness and providing unconditional aid to people in need.

We call for all to uphold the primacy of health and humanity, regardless of nationality, identity, religion, or geographic location, and to prioritise the immediate establishment of continuous and effective life-saving safe zones and humanitarian corridors in and out of Gaza, and recognition of the human rights of civilians in the region and immediate action to uphold these rights.

Since the establishment of the United Nations and its agencies in the post-war period, global governance has been based on an important social contract: one where we trust those elected by us or by our elected representatives to act on our behalf and in our collective interests. As global health professionals, we have witnessed the continual refusal and/or failure to act by those in positions of power and trust: on the climate and environmental crisis, on sustainable development, on socioeconomic inequity, on harmful commercial interests, and on conflict.

As global citizens and health professionals, it is increasingly clear that we cannot leave it to others to act without speaking up. Silence is itself part of the problem. We call for:

Immediate humanitarian priorities:

1. An immediate ceasefire and the lifting of the siege in Gaza.
2. Respect of and accountability to international humanitarian law
3. The immediate establishment of continuous and effective safe zones, humanitarian corridors, the right to flee and right of return.
4. The recognition of the human rights of all people in the region, including the right to health, access to water and food, and immediate action to uphold these rights
5. Safeguarding the physical and mental health and welfare of children, pregnant women, elderly, disabled and wounded as most vulnerable in conflict and ensure immediate passage and fair distribution of aid to all to meet their basic and special needs.
6. The immediate flow of essential supplies and other humanitarian support into Gaza
7. The unequivocal protection of health services and those receiving or providing all forms of health care, as well as facilitating the delivery of care by humanitarian actors. This includes protections against the destruction of all critical infrastructure and objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, including but not limited to hospitals and other centres delivering healthcare services as well as roads,

clean water, uninterrupted electricity, and other necessary tools and supplies.

Longer term objectives:

1. Unfettered access for organisations investigating alleged war crimes, including the bombing of the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital
2. New determination to equitably meet the needs of all on the basis of self-determination, justice, and human rights for all
3. Uphold and enforce actions to address hate crime based on antisemitism and islamophobia worldwide
4. International solidarity to support those displaced by the violence, in the form of humanitarian or financial support, asylum, or by whatever needed means to grant displaced persons dignity, autonomy, recovery, and the right to return.

We also urge colleagues to:

1. Write letters to politicians and other elected officials to urge them to take actions to stop the killing of civilians
2. Amplify and elevate the voices of those most impacted by the conflict.
3. Work to ensure the right of return of Palestinian refugees and the right of Palestinians, Israelis, and all people to live with dignity, equality, and freedom
4. Uphold respect and non-violence in our communities and workplaces
5. Support nonviolent movements to place pressure on governments to uphold human rights and enforce international law
6. Donate what we can - money, knowledge, and human resources - to support justice and peace in the region
7. Share this widely

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