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21 May 2021

Dear Ambassador,

**Re: Pursuing protection for Palestinian healthcare workers and medical facilities at the UN Security Council**

I am writing to you to express deep concern regarding attacks on Palestinian healthcare workers and medical infrastructure by Israel, and to urge you to raise this issue at the upcoming UNSC open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict on 25 May and to work with Member States to pursue accountability for these attacks.

**The World Health Organization (WHO), Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and local human rights organisations have documented widespread attacks on Palestinian healthcare workers and facilities in the context of Israel's military assault on Gaza and its systematic use of excessive force against protesters in the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem.**

In its latest military assault on Gaza, Israeli airstrikes damaged eight hospitals and twelve primary care clinics according to the Health Cluster, a Ministry of Health building, and the offices of NGOs including the [Qatar Red Crescent Society](#). Extensive damage to the [Hala Al Shwa primary healthcare clinic in North Gaza](#) impacted all services including COVID-19 testing and vaccination, and the Ministry of Health in Gaza also reported that damage to the Al Remal clinic in Gaza City impacted its laboratory and caused the suspension of COVID-19 testing and telemedicine services. [Two doctors](#) and a [psychologist](#) have also been killed along with members of their families.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Palestinians protesting Israel's discriminatory practices and systematic violations of international law have been met with widespread use of excessive force, including live ammunition, rubber-coated steel bullets, tear gas, and "skunk water", causing more than 6,300 injuries. Israeli forces have [impeded the work of Palestinian health workers](#), including by preventing access to the wounded, delaying the transportation of injured people, and physically assaulting paramedics and ambulances.

**MAP welcomes the recent announcement of a ceasefire, a necessary first step towards the protection of civilians and healthcare workers, and urges the international community to ensure the ceasefire is lasting.** While the latest military assault on Gaza has ended, these attacks occurred in the context of Israel's 14-year blockade and illegal closure of Gaza, considered ["collective punishment" of a population of two million by the ICRC](#), which has led to the de-development of health sector. They also took place amid an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has badly stretched Gaza's health services, and Israel's persistent failure to meet its legal duty as an occupying power to ensure [rapid, equitable and comprehensive access to vaccines](#) for Palestinians. Widespread [destruction to civilian homes](#) has caused the [displacement of 91,000](#) people, with most now

sheltering in crowded schools and mosques, putting the population at risk of another COVID-19 surge. Major challenges remain to rebuild, rehabilitate, and sustainably develop healthcare in Gaza. **Urgent action is needed to ensure the opening of crossings for fuel and emergency humanitarian relief as part of broader efforts towards ending the 14-year illegal closure of Gaza.**

The incidents of the past week reflect a persistent and clear pattern of attacks on Palestinian healthcare over many years. Dozens of health workers were injured and killed and facilities damaged and [destroyed in the 2008/9, 2012 and 2014 assaults on Gaza](#) and Israeli forces perpetrated [deadly attacks on Palestinian medics](#) during the Great March of Return protests in 2018/19. Israel [has consistently failed to conduct genuine investigations into these attacks](#), or to hold wrongdoers to account. The international community, too, has failed to ensure accountability, which has made the recurrence we are witnessing today inevitable.

**No state can be allowed to be above the law, particularly as regards the fundamental protections of civilian and humanitarian persons and objects under international humanitarian law. Attacks on health workers in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) undermine the protection of healthcare everywhere.**

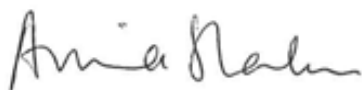
In 2016, Resolution 2286 forcefully condemned attacks on health services in conflicts around the world, demanding that states comply with international humanitarian and human rights law which prohibits such violations, and urging states to take proactive steps to hold perpetrators to account. Five years on, Israel's continuing and systematic violations against Palestinian healthcare demonstrate the urgency of taking such steps in the context of the oPt.

**Urgent action is needed to protect Palestinian health workers from further violence, and to ensure an end to the chronic impunity that fosters the recurrence of attacks on Palestinian healthcare. I therefore urge you to express your unequivocal condemnation of these attacks at the upcoming UNSC open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict on 25 May, and to work with other member states to pursue meaningful accountability, including through supporting the International Criminal Court's investigation into the situation in Palestine.**

A failure to do so would abandon Palestinian health workers and civilians to further violence, and signal tacit endorsement of Israel's practices, and a disregard for international law.

**It is critical that Palestinian voices are heard at all levels of decision-making, and we are available and ready to connect you with humanitarian and health workers on the ground in Gaza to better understand the impact of these attacks on healthcare.**

Yours faithfully,



Dr Aimee Shalan,  
Chief Executive,  
Medical Aid for Palestinians



Dr Philippe de Botton  
President,  
Médecins Du Monde