

Human Rights Council oral statement from emergency physician Dr Tarek Loubani

Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights' report on the occupied Palestinian territory (Item 2, 24 February 2021)

I am one of the 810 health workers shot, wounded or killed during the 2018-2019 'Great March of Return' protests in Gaza by Israeli forces amid their systematic use of live ammunition, rubber-coated steel bullets and tear gas.

I was never a threat and was only carrying out my duties as a field doctor. The first paramedic to treat me, Musa Abuhassanin, later became the first of four health workers who were killed while working at the protests.

In 2019, the UN independent Commission of Inquiry on the Gaza protests found "reasonable grounds to believe that Israeli snipers intentionally shot health workers", calling the occupied Palestinian territories "one of the most dangerous places in the world for healthcare workers."

I addressed the Council two years ago as one of the named victims and warned that without action from the international community, healthcare in the occupied Palestinian territory would continue to come under attack.

Since that day, a further 169 health workers have come under attack in the occupied Palestinian territory. In 2019, 226 incidents caused 304 injuries and damage to at least 35 ambulances.

In 2020, the World Health Organization documented at least more 56 attacks. Two months ago, three Palestinian hospitals were attacked by Israeli forces, one was a children's hospital.

Yet again nobody has been held accountable despite clear recommendations from the UN Commission of Inquiry. A report by Medical Aid for Palestinians, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights and Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights documents Israel's persistent failure to genuinely investigate attacks on healthcare.

Member states must pursue accountability for attacks on medical personnel and facilities to ensure justice for victims, to deter further violence and to end impunity.