



Medical
Association for
Prevention of War
(Australia)

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Senator the Hon Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

19 May 2021

Dear Minister,

The Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia) is gravely concerned by the recent escalation of violence between Israel and Palestine and the grossly disproportionate impact on Palestinian civilians.

As of 17 May 2021, the WHO in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt) has reported¹:

- 222 Palestinians, including 55 children², killed across the oPt
- Damage to six hospitals and eight primary care clinics in Gaza Strip
- 41 health workers injured in the West Bank
- Zero stock of 46% of essential drugs and 33% of essential medical supplies in the Gaza Strip
- 36 incidents of obstruction of medical access in the West Bank
- Damage to water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure across the oPt, including to wastewater networks and the North Gaza Seawater Desalination Plant

The Palestinian Red Crescent has reported the following cumulative injury totals for 7- 15 May in the West Bank³:

- 2292 injuries from the use of tear gas
- 1438 injuries from the use of rubber bullets
- 410 injuries from the use of live bullets

The United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the oPt additionally reports⁴:

- Power outages have created an urgent need for 400 000 litres of fuel to enable the function of 33 critical health facilities in Gaza
- At least 800 000 people are without access to piped water

¹http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/WHO_oPt_flash_update_2_17_May.pdf?ua=1

²<https://www.unicef.org/sop/press-releases/statement-unicef-executive-director-henrietta-fore-situation-gaza>

³ <https://www.palestinercs.org/index.php?page=post&pid=26581&catid=4&parentid=67&langid=1>

⁴<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/escalation-gaza-strip-west-bank-and-israel-flash-update-7-1200-17-may-2021>

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- At least 42 000 internally displaced persons are in emergency protection shelters

In relation to the Israeli casualties, Magen David Adom reported on 19 May⁵:

- 12 killed by rocket attacks, including 2 children
- 194 injured in riots
- 114 injured from shrapnel
- 226 treated for stress

On 16 May the United Nations reported⁶:

- Damage to Israeli residential and commercial property, one school and a crude oil pipeline from rocket attacks

It is evident that civilians in the oPt are disproportionately affected by the most recent escalation of violence. While Palestinian attacks on Israel are unacceptable, cause human suffering, and perpetuate the cycle of violence, there is no comparison between the scale of violence, or between the humanitarian situations in Israel and in the oPt.

The destruction of medical facilities in the oPt compounds pre-existing health inequalities, with Palestinians faring worse than Israelis in indicators like infant, child and maternal mortality, life expectancy, mortality rates for leading causes of death, mental health, and access to COVID-19 vaccines.⁷ In further breach of Israel's obligations as an occupying power to ensure medical and hospital care for those under occupation, Palestinians also suffer longstanding and significant barriers to access to adequate treatment, equipment, and medicines in an undeveloped and underfunded health system.

The disadvantages in health suffered by Palestinians living under occupation are exacerbated by programs of dispossession of their land, homes, and livelihoods, as well as unlawful killings, excessive use of force, discrimination, arbitrary detention, and reduced freedom of movement and expression, as documented by Amnesty International.⁸

The destruction of medical facilities and infrastructure essential to the survival of civilian populations, and denial of access to medical care, are crimes under international law. Israeli settlement of Palestine has been determined by a United Nations Security Council Resolution to be illegal under international law, and the International Committee of the Red Cross have determined key Israeli actions in the oPt to be in breach of obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention.⁹

We urge you to act courageously to uphold international law and the universal right to life and adequate health care.

⁵ <https://twitter.com/Mdais/status/1394747641083400201/photo/1>

⁶ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14521.doc.htm>

⁷ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17441692.2020.1808037>

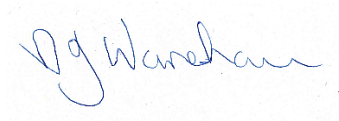
⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/report-israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/>

⁹ <https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc-888-maurer.pdf>

Australia can and should work for an immediate cessation of all violence, the establishment of humanitarian corridors, and accountability for all actors.

Australia can and should promote the rule of law by acting to address the occupation of Palestine and supporting efforts to secure a just and sustainable peace that returns the universal right to life, health, dignity and self-determination to the Palestinian people.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sue Wareham', is written over a light blue grid background.

Dr Sue Wareham OAM
President, MAPW (Australia)