

LB1: End Attacks on Health and Human Rights in Palestine

1 I. TITLE: End Attacks on Health and Human Rights in Palestine

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22 III. Sponsoring Unit: N/A

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24 IV. Collaborating Units: N/A

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26 V. Endorsements:

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28 *Internal Endorsements:*

29 Palestine Health Justice Working Group, APHA

30 International Health Section

31 Peace Caucus

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33 *External Endorsements:*

34 Jewish Voice for Peace Health Advisory Council

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36 VI. Relationship to existing APHA policy statements

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38 APHA has a history of supporting health and human rights for all; in advocating for the health of civilians
39 affected by war and conflict, including but not limited to refugees, women, children, and other vulnerable
40 people; in protecting healthcare workers and health facilities in areas of conflict; against U.S. involvement
41 in war; in highlighting how budgetary priorities in support of militarism and war undermine public health;
42 and in recognizing the powerful role that health professionals have in preventing and mitigating the public
43 health consequences of war and conflict. Previous statements adopted by the association related to this
44 topic are as follows:

- 45 1. APHA Policy Statement 20095 [The Role of Public Health Practitioners, Academics, and](#)
46 [Advocates in Relation to Armed Conflict and War](#)
- 47 2. APHA Policy Statement 201910 [A Call to End Violent Attacks on Health Workers and Health](#)
48 [Facilities in War and Armed Conflict Settings](#)
- 49 3. APHA Policy Statement 20188: [Advancing the Health of Refugees and Displaced Persons](#)
- 50 4. APHA Policy Statement 201710 [Protecting Children's Environmental Health: A Comprehensive](#)
51 [Framework](#)
- 52 5. APHA Policy Statement 200030 [Preventing Genocide](#)
- 53 6. APHA Policy Statement 20208 [A Call to End the Bombing of Yemen and the Blockade on Its](#)
54 [Ports](#)
- 55 7. APHA Policy Statement 200718 [Opposition to US Attack on Iran](#)
- 56 8. APHA Policy Statement 200617 [Opposition to the Continuation of the War in Iraq](#)
- 57 9. APHA Policy Statement 20209 [Toward a World Free of Nuclear Weapons](#)

58 The following statements are archived, but they represent historical APHA positions in this area:

- 59 ● APHA Policy Statement 9923: Opposing War in the Middle East
- 60 ● APHA Policy Statement 9817: Arms Trade Code of Conduct
- 61 ● APHA Policy Statement 9715: Impact of Economic Embargoes on Populations Health
62 and Wellbeing
- 63 ● APHA Policy Statement 8926: Foreign Assistance Act
- 64 ● APHA Policy Statement 8531(PP) - The Health Effects of Militarism
- 65 ● APHA Policy Statement 7913: World Peace and the Military Budget

- 66 ● APHA Policy Statement 7632(PP): Policy Statement on International Health
- 67 ● APHA Policy Statement 6716(PP): International Health
- 68 ● APHA Policy Statement 9122: The Impact of Political Violence on Health and Health
- 69 Services in South Africa
- 70 ● APHA Policy Statement 6901 – Chemical and Biological Methods of Warfare
- 71 ● APHA Policy Statement 7319 – Lives and Safety of Public Health Colleagues in Chile
- 72 ● APHA Policy Statement 200211 - Opposing War in Central Asia and the Persian Gulf

73

74 VII. Summary:

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76 On October 7, 2023, in response to a Hamas attack on Israeli civilians, Israel initiated a complete siege on
77 the Gaza Strip (barring entry of food, water, medicines, and other supplies) as well as a devastating
78 campaign of airstrikes on the densely populated territory, home to more than 2 million civilians (half of
79 whom are children). At the time of writing, a ground invasion by the Israeli military appears imminent.
80 Already, the loss of life and vital infrastructure, not to mention untold physical and mental trauma, have
81 caused a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip that surpasses those created by the five previous assaults on
82 the Gaza Strip. More Palestinian civilians have died since October 7 than were killed in fifty-one days of
83 the 2014 war, which until this past week was the deadliest of the five previous major Israeli military
84 campaigns in Gaza. Today, civilians are being denied access to the most basic social determinants of
85 health (including food, water, education, and housing), are experiencing severe traumatic mental and
86 physical injuries, and have increasingly little access to health care due to bombings, displacement, and the
87 deaths of multiple humanitarian workers. Health care workers from the Gaza Strip have pleaded for the
88 international community to respond as they attempt to continue to treat their patients in desperate
89 circumstances. It is imperative that the public health community speak up during this clear public health
90 crisis.

91 VIII. Rationale for Consideration:

92 As health care and public health professionals, we unequivocally condemn violence against non-
93 combatant civilians. International law recognizes attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including
94 health care facilities, as well as purposeful deprivation of food, water, shelter, and medical care, as war
95 crimes and crimes against humanity. The medical and public health consequences of these forms of
96 structural and direct violence on civilians are horrendous, of catastrophic levels, and extend well beyond
97 the acute loss of life in its impact on future generations. Attacks on civilians, infrastructure, and medical

98 personnel are part of an ongoing, deliberate attempt to undermine health, well-being, and sovereignty in
99 Palestine – a project rooted in settler-colonialism and apartheid.^{1,2}

100

101 This late breaker is proposed because at the time of writing this policy, Israel and Hamas are engaged in a
102 war that is resulting in thousands of civilian deaths and injuries and the possible destruction of the entire
103 infrastructure of the Gaza Strip. There has also been a serious rise in attacks on Palestinian civilians in the
104 West Bank. Public health professionals and the APHA can have a major impact in mitigating these
105 attacks through education and advocacy to pressure the U.S. government to work with Israel and other
106 nations to end the war, allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, and begin the process of rebuilding.

107

108 IX. Problem Statement

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110 As public health professionals acting on the ethics of our profession, we state unequivocally that the
111 slaughter or capture of civilians is unconscionable regardless of the perpetrator or the justification. We
112 condemn all attacks on all civilians. We also recognize that the Israeli military occupation of Palestine,
113 the Israeli siege of Gaza and the Israeli apartheid system are forms of violence that have been largely
114 ignored by the international community. Only through addressing systemic injustices can we arrive at a
115 just and peaceful solution, one that will ultimately allow Palestinians and Israelis alike to enjoy a safe and
116 healthy future.

117

118 Between Oct. 7, 2023, and the date of this writing (Oct. 18, 2023), Israeli forces have killed more than
119 3,000 Palestinians in Gaza (including at least 1000 children) and injured 12,500³. Israeli casualties are
120 reported as 1,300 fatalities and 4,229 injured. The United Nations estimates that an estimated one million
121 of Palestinians have become displaced in Gaza, with the only plan advanced thus far is to settle them in
122 the Sinai Desert in tents⁴, leading the United Nations to describe these events as a mass ethnic cleansing⁵.
123 Israel has also cut electricity to Gaza and has totally closed the borders so that no water, food, fuel or
124 humanitarian aid of any kind including medical supplies can be transported inside the territory. Although
125 a recent agreement to allow some amount of supply trucks through Egypt has purportedly been reached
126 between Israel and the United States, the level of damage and destruction to vital facilities such as
127 hospitals and clinics will continue to perpetuate a humanitarian crisis and intermittent allowances of
128 tightly restricted supplies are insufficient to meet population needs.

129

130 As health professionals, we are particularly concerned with the many reported instances of the Israeli
131 military blocking access to health care services. As of Oct. 18, 2023, 112 cases of attacks on health care
132 in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt) have been reported, including violence with heavy weapons,
133 obstruction, arrest or detention of medical personnel, and psychological threats and intimidation⁶. On Oct.
134 17, 2023, the Palestinian Ministry of Health reported approximately 500 dead after a large explosion
135 occurred at the Al Ahli Arab Hospital in the middle of Gaza⁷ where hundreds of civilians were taking
136 shelter. An independent investigation is needed to determine the source of the missile.

137
138 The World Health Organization (WHO) has documented more than 136 attacks on health care services in
139 the oPt, including 59 attacks on facilities in the Gaza Strip. Sixteen health workers have been killed since
140 the beginning of hostilities on 7 October. “Israeli bombardments on Gaza have also killed 15 staff of the
141 United Nations Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA) and four Palestine Red Crescent paramedics in an
142 ambulance”⁸.

143
144 In preparation for a ground invasion, Israel has directed 1.1 million people in Gaza to go 15 miles south⁹,
145 amidst dangerous conditions like continued explosives¹⁰ even among the so- called “safe routes.” Israel
146 persisted with its evacuation orders despite the United Nations’ assertion that an evacuation of this
147 magnitude, under these conditions, was impossible, particularly for vulnerable people and especially for
148 hospitals¹¹. Healthcare facilities cannot, practically and ethically, evacuate patients or cease provision of
149 services¹².

150
151 As public health professionals, we call on the U.S. government to immediately support a lasting ceasefire,
152 as called on by the United Nations and multiple humanitarian and global health organizations, so that
153 necessary supplies can be delivered to Palestinians and lives can be spared.

154
155 The American Public Health Association promotes an unequivocal belief that health is a human right. In
156 recent years, APHA has asserted that the prevention of genocide (#200030), the health effects of
157 militarism (#8531), the health of refugees (#8531), law enforcement violence (#201811), attacks on
158 healthcare workers (#201910), and health within armed conflict and war (#20095) are public health
159 matters deserving of our attention and action. As an organized body within APHA focused on health
160 justice in Palestine, the Palestine Health Justice Working Group urges APHA, one of the leading global
161 public health organizations, to voice its opposition to Israel’s continued assaults on Palestinian health and
162 freedom, as it has in contexts of Iran (#277718), Iraq (#200617), South Africa (#9122), Nicaragua
163 (#8306), and other locations. We urge our public health colleagues to continue to act on the ethics of our

164 profession and speak out against Israeli state-sponsored destruction of Palestinian health, infrastructure,
165 and public health workforce in our organizations and communities.

166

167 X. Evidence-Based Strategies to Address the Problem

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169 Strategy 1: Ceasefire and de-escalation

170

171 We recognize that the United States, which supplies over \$3.8 billion in military aid to Israel annually and
172 provides tremendous political cover for these actions, has the power to stop this violence at its root by
173 supporting a just resolution. No action in the history of any war could ever justify the mass eviction of 1.1
174 million civilians, as the Israeli government has sought to do to the Palestinian residents of Northern
175 Gaza⁹.

176

177 Strategy 2: Independent Investigations

178

179 The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory by the
180 United Nations was launched Oct. 7, 2023¹³ to examine all those in the region from all sides who violated
181 international law and targeted civilians. As public health professionals, we urge that these independent
182 investigations include the short- and long- term health effects of the recent attacks, including the effects
183 on rates of physical and mental disability related to the physical and emotional trauma of the attacks and
184 the ongoing aggression. These investigations should also examine the charges by Human Rights Watch¹⁴
185 that Israel used white phosphorus in Gaza and Lebanon on Oct. 10 and 11, 2023, which is against
186 international law.

187

188 Strategy 3: Humanitarian Corridor

189

190 The World Health Organization (WHO), with decades of experience dealing with global health
191 catastrophes and emergencies of all sorts, has prepared medical supplies in its logistics hub in Dubai that
192 would suffice to care for more than 300,000 patients with a range of wounds and diseases. WHO has
193 requested the immediate establishment of a humanitarian corridor for the safe delivery to health care
194 facilities in Gaza, while continuing to plead for humanitarian access for life-saving supplies and the
195 delivery of fuel, water, and food. WHO has also called for protection under international humanitarian
196 law for civilians, health workers and health infrastructure; and ultimately, for an end to hostilities and
197 violence.¹⁵

198

199 Strategy 4: Protect Civilian Life

200

201 WHO has echoed the pleas of United Nations General António Guterres, who has also stated that all
202 hostages in Gaza must be released, and that civilians must not be used as human shields, in line with
203 international humanitarian law such as the Geneva Conventions. Accordingly, Guterres has called for the
204 protection of civilians on both sides, and specifically demanded that schools, clinics and United Nations
205 premises and personnel must never be targeted.¹⁶

206

207 XI. Opposing Arguments/Evidence

208

209 Opposing Argument 1: Israel is defending itself.

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211 This is a primary opposing argument suggesting Israel is only exercising a necessary level of force in
212 pursuit of self-defense.

213

214 Response: Since its creation, Israel's response to any fatal attacks upon them are consistently
215 disproportionate and result in mass casualties of innocent Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank.
216 Since October 7th, 2023, critiques of Israel's response by international government leaders are growing
217 and currently include Ireland, Norway, South Africa. These entities, along with nearly every global
218 humanitarian agency, are calling for a ceasefire, citing the widespread destruction of civilian
219 infrastructure in Gaza by Israel (e.g. hospitals, schools, houses of worship), the deaths of Palestinian
220 children (which make up over half of the Gazan population), and the cutting of power, fuel supplies, and
221 water into Gaza¹⁷. Commenting on Israel's decision to block critical resources from entering into Gaza,
222 the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights points to the war crime of 'collective
223 punishment' outlined in the Geneva Convention¹⁸ by stating "the imposition of sieges that endanger the
224 lives of civilians by depriving them of goods essential for their survival is prohibited under international
225 humanitarian law¹⁹." Additionally, the evacuation order of north Gaza, home to almost 1.1 million people,
226 fits the description of inhumane acts as defined by the 1973 United Nations International Convention on
227 the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid²⁰ and 1998 Rome Statute of the International
228 Criminal Court²¹, including denying people the right to leave and to return to their country, and
229 expatriation of landed property.

230

231 XII. Alternative Strategies: N/A

232

233 XIII. Action Steps

234 The American Public Health Association (APHA), in pursuit of human rights and health, urges the
235 President, Congress and the Israeli government to call for:

236

237 (1) an immediate and lasting ceasefire in Gaza;

238

239 (2) an end to the economic blockade and siege by land, sea and air of Gaza that has facilitated the
240 destruction of the healthcare system and deteriorating health for Palestinians living there.

241

242 (3) Israel to halt efforts of forced removal and facilitate the return of the 1.1 million Palestinians forced to
243 flee within this round of hostilities, and to fund the repair of Palestinian homes, businesses, and
244 infrastructure, including the (as of Oct. 17, 2023) 8,840 housing units destroyed by Israel and 5,434
245 housing units damaged beyond habitation; 26 health care facilities and 167 education facilities (including
246 20 UN schools, two of which had been used as emergency shelters)³.

247

248 (4) the U.S. government to support independent investigations into, and appropriate responses to, the
249 evacuation order, and to attacks on civilians, healthcare, and healthcare workers, including the bombing
250 of healthcare facilities and hospitals, which are in clear violation of international law and the ethics of
251 public health, such as the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian
252 Territory by the United Nations.

253

254 (5) the public health community to join the international community in holding Israel accountable and
255 pushing to end the support of our governments for Israel's control and destruction of Palestinian land and
256 infrastructure; this includes advocating to stop financial and military support.

257

258 (6) to follow-through on the announcement on 10/18/23 by President Biden of \$100 million for assistance
259 to the Palestinian people.

260

261

262 Finally, the APHA asserts to all parties that:

263 (7) the attacks on civilians, infrastructure, and medical personnel are part of an ongoing, deliberate
264 attempt to undermine health, well-being, and sovereignty in Palestine – a project rooted in settler-
265 colonialism and apartheid². The latest assaults on Gaza outstrip any previous attacks in the sheer terror

266 they induce and remain a part of the settler colonial project that undermines health in Palestine. We call
267 on the public health community to understand it thusly, and to push for a lasting end to Israeli state-
268 sponsored violence against the Palestinian people, in Israel, in the West Bank, in Jerusalem, and in Gaza.

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