

19th May 2021
12pm
Johannesburg South Africa

South African Health-workers stand in solidarity with Palestinians

More than 600 health-workers have condemned the attacks against Palestinians by endorsing the statement below.

In an overwhelmingly rapid and heartfelt response, 601 health-workers signed within 48 hours of releasing the document. Signatories include a range of South African health workers, 450 medical doctors; health professionals from many fields; academics and medical students, from across the country.

Signatories include Professor Ames Dhai Specialist Ethicist, Office of President and CEO South African Medical Research Council, Visiting Professor School of Clinical Medicine, University of the Witwatersrand; Professor Glenda Gray, President of the South African Medical Research Council and retired Professor Yusuf Veriava, who was detained as a young doctor and was the first applicant in the hearing against doctors complicit in the events leading to the death of medical student, Steven Bantu Biko.

Our lived experience in South Africa under the apartheid system which was a crime against humanity, and our medical ethical duties have obliged us to stand up again for the humanitarian cause of the Palestinian People who are oppressed by apartheid Israel.

For further information

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A statement of solidarity with the Palestinian People

We, as South African health workers unequivocally condemn the latest violence against Palestinians by the state of Israel. We protest the ongoing apartheid policies of Israel which has devastating and dehumanising impacts on the health and dignity of Palestinian communities from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean sea.

In what is yet another violation of medical neutrality and the Geneva Conventions, Israel has in recent days, blocked ambulances from reaching wounded patients in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. While settlers were violently dispossessing Palestinians from their land and homes, Israeli forces were preventing those Palestinians they had wounded from receiving treatment.

We are horrified by the latest wave of air strikes unleashed on the 2 million people trapped in the 365 sq. km open air prison that is Gaza. Nowhere is safe in Gaza. The principal of 'do no harm' which has histories in Jewish and Islamic, as well as Chinese and Indian medicine was violated when Health facilities in Gaza, including a Medecins Sans Frontieres clinic were struck and damaged, and when the main road to access Al Shifa hospital became virtually impassable due to bomb craters.

On the 15th May 2021, our colleague, Dr Ayman Abu Aloof, the head of the Internal Medicine Department at Al Shifa hospital and head of the COVID-19 response was killed by an Israeli airstrike on his home.

As health workers, we have a duty to speak out in support of saving lives and caring for all people. We cannot turn a blind eye in the face of such suffering. We see much of Apartheid South Africa's policies practiced by the Israeli state. When Palestinians are segregated into enclaves and are denied the means to provide health care to their population, we are reminded of the bantustans of South Africa. Palestinians are unable

to access specialist treatment in 'Israeli only' health facilities without special permits, some have died waiting for such travel permits . We saw this in 'whites only' health facilities in apartheid South Africa. Palestinians are stripped of their dignity through dehumanising searches and restrictions on movement, echoing our own history of the pass law system. As Palestinians, including children, are arrested, beaten and tortured we remember the brutal policing of apartheid South Africa.

Apartheid is implemented in healthcare. Israel reached record levels of COVID -19 vaccination coverage recently while denying Palestinians the same vaccines, despite its obligations under international law. Gaza itself remains under a cruel siege that limits the amount of medical supplies allowed in. The health status of the population deteriorates as a direct result of the conditions in Gaza. These include limited water and electricity supplies, which are controlled at the whim of Israel, overcrowding and poor infrastructure that has been further devastated by years of Israeli bombing.

We say that apartheid Israel must also be held accountable for the longer term devastating effects its polices have on the health of Palestinians.

The Human Rights Watch report has found that Israeli authorities in 2020 systematically repressed and discriminated against Palestinians in ways that far exceeded the security justifications they often provided. As health workers, we cannot accept this. The health consequences of this oppression and violence are man-made and it is for this reason that we join the call for the boycott, divestment and sanctions on Israel. Academic institutions, of which some of us are a part, must also cut all ties with apartheid Israel. The health and dignity of Palestinians depends on it.

Signed by 601 Health-care workers in South Africa 17-19th May 2021

Supported by the BDS-SA Coalition

