

HEALTHCARE WORKERS AS HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS: A MEDICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ISRAEL'S GENOCIDE ENABLEMENT APPARATUS IN GAZA AND ABROAD

Executive Summary

This report, submitted to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health on 10 January 2025, outlines a **two-pronged framework of Israel's Genocide Enablement Apparatus**, which has accelerated the annihilation of Palestinian people since October 2023 through the Israeli-led destruction of the healthcare sector in Gaza, and the simultaneous repression of healthcare workers implemented by American, British and Canadian (hereafter 'Western') medical and cultural institutions. Additionally, this report establishes a **medical definition of genocide**, built from lessons from the ongoing genocide in Gaza, to enable and support the role of healthcare workers both as key frontline protectors of the right to health and life, and as meaningful actors in the early prevention of genocide.

The report highlights the **urgent need** for a medical definition of genocide to enable **timely interventions by healthcare workers**, particularly those who witness the systematic destruction of human lives in real time. Current legal frameworks, often slowed by political considerations and the prolonged process of establishing intent, delay critical action. A medical framework, **rooted in observable impacts on health and life**, empowers healthcare workers to act swiftly, preventing escalation and saving lives. Without a medical definition, healthcare workers are left without the tools to act decisively in the face of unfolding atrocities, hindering efforts to prevent further death and destruction.

Scope and Objectives

The report responds to the Special Rapporteur's call to assess the rights of healthcare workers in conflict zones and their role in safeguarding the right to health and human rights. Specifically it:

1. Outlines a two-pronged framework of **Israel's Genocide Enablement Apparatus**, which involves the Israeli-led systematic targeting of the Palestinian healthcare sector in Gaza and the suppression of healthcare workers by their Western medical and cultural institutions for advocating against these actions.

2. Describes the Apparatus as it functions in Gaza, including Israel's **destruction of the Palestinian health sector** as central to its genocidal military violence in Gaza, and Israel's **restrictions on the entry of healthcare workers, international organizations, and medical supplies into Gaza**;
3. Explores the apparatus as it functions in Western institutions, documenting the **silencing, intimidation, and reprisals against healthcare workers** advocating for Palestinian rights; and
4. Proposes a **medical definition of genocide**, built from the lessons of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, recognizing it as a societal disease and severe public health threat, to support healthcare workers as key actors in prevention and intervention.

Summary of Findings

Drawing upon hundreds of documented testimonials and the lived experiences of Palestinian and international healthcare workers and advocates who have lived and worked in Gaza or who have advocated for the rights of Palestinians in other countries, along with the evidence materials and documentation collected during their time in Gaza, this report makes **five unique contributions**:

1. Israel's Genocide Enablement Apparatus:
 1. The deliberate targeting of Palestinian healthcare infrastructure and personnel in Gaza since October 2023 has accelerated the annihilation of the Palestinian people.
 2. Simultaneously, Western medical and cultural institutions have engaged in the widespread repression of healthcare workers advocating for Palestinian rights, suppressing a critical professional class that has a particular moral obligation to uphold life.
2. Cumulative Impact on Gaza's Healthcare System:
 1. The destruction of medical facilities, coupled with the closure of the Rafah crossing, has severely restricted medical supplies and humanitarian aid, exacerbating the health crisis.
 2. Mass displacement, unsanitary conditions, and the collapse of healthcare infrastructure have led to widespread preventable morbidity and mortality.
3. Reprisals and Repression in Western Institutions:
 1. Healthcare workers who document or speak out against Israel's actions face employment termination, harassment, censorship, and professional blacklisting, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups.
 2. This suppression normalizes the targeting of healthcare workers and facilities, setting a dangerous global precedent.
4. Medical Definition of Genocide:
 1. Genocide is defined as a societal disease with identifiable symptoms, including mass killings, the systemic deprivation of essential resources, and the destruction of healthcare systems.
 2. A medical definition is shaped by a public health perspective, emphasizing prevention and early detection, allowing for rapid response and reducing reliance on proving intent.
5. Healthcare Workers as Human Rights Defenders
 1. Healthcare workers in Gaza and globally bear witness to atrocities, providing vital care and documenting war crimes. Their role as first responders to genocide underscores the need for a framework that empowers and protects them when giving testimony to war crimes at the local, national, regional, and international levels.

Recommendations

1. International adoption of a **medical definition of genocide to prioritize prevention, risk reduction, and accountability.**
2. Establishment of an **independent international medical body with the authority** to
 - a. Monitor and identify early signs of genocide using medical data;
 - b. Mobilize international resources for intervention and protection; and
 - c. Hold perpetrators accountable for targeting healthcare systems and workers.
3. Amending existing International Humanitarian Law to define the **repression of healthcare workers speaking out against acts of genocide as a form of genocide incitement and abetment**, in violation of the Genocide Convention (1948) and complicity in genocide, prohibited in Article 3(e).

Conclusion

The report underscores the **urgent need to protect healthcare systems and workers** during conflict and amid genocidal violence. By adopting the frameworks outlined in this report, and establishing an independent international medical body with executive powers, the global medical community can transform its response to atrocities against humanity. To **prevent ongoing and possible future renditions of the types of genocidal violence that have been perpetrated against and continue to be unleashed upon Palestinians in Gaza** the approach proposed in this report ensures that mass violence and systemic racialized oppression are addressed with the urgency, precision, and authority they demand—safeguarding human life and dignity above all else.

Report Contributors

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