

SfGH UK Statement on Gaza, Healthcare and Israel's War Crimes:

Our calls for the UK government, universities and medical institutions!
(and our support for students protesting their universities for divestment)

30th August 2024



Title image: Guernica, now and then

CONTENT WARNING: *this statement contains references of violence, torture, physical and sexual abuse, as well as links to video evidence that is distressing and contains discriminatory language.*

*The content of this statement is emotionally heavy. If you feel distressed please consider contacting a support network. In the UK you can call **Samaritans** on 116 123 or text '**shout**' to 85258 for free 24/7.*

**RIGHT TO
HEALTH**

**Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate
for the health and well-being of himself and of his family**

(United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, art. 25)

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Introduction

Health systems are the backbone of any society; they allow people to be born, live and die in comfort, dignity and peace. Destroying a healthcare system is equivalent to erasing all aspects of safety in a society. Students for Global Health UK (SfGH UK) has a commitment to its vision, which is "a fair and just world where health equity exists for all". As an organisation, we strive to protect and promote the rights of individuals and groups to universal healthcare, Human Rights and systemic justice. Over the past 11 months, many of our members have been involved in local, national and international efforts of Palestinian solidarity. This statement is to clarify our stance on the issue and explain the evidence behind it. Like so many people around the world, we want to see a free Palestine and an end to the Israeli occupation and its apartheid regime.

History

For over 76 years now, Palestine has faced settler-colonial occupation and apartheid from the state of Israel, which is in violation of at least 5 categories of international human rights' law. Palestinian citizens have been demonised, dispossessed and dehumanised by the Israeli regime and this has been well documented for decades. As a state party to the Genocide Convention, it is illegal for the UK to assist countries in acts of genocide and furthermore it must do everything in its power to stop suspected risks of genocide. For Palestine, the UK's illegal Balfour Declaration in 1917 paved the way for the inception of the Israeli state in 1948, when the first Nakba was committed. A top UN official has said that Hamas is considered as a political movement, because it emerged in response to Israel's occupation of Palestine and oppression of Palestinians. Israel's violations of International Law and Human Rights' abuses have been documented for decades, long before Hamas was created. Since 7th October 2023, when Hamas and IDF friendly-fire killed over 1,100 Israelis, some of whom were combatants, and took 250 Israeli civilians hostage, Israel has killed over 40,000 Palestinians and injured over 92,000 in the Gaza Strip, as well as killing over 600 and injuring over 5,400 in the West Bank. Israel has detained over 15,000 Palestinians from both Gaza and the West Bank, many earlier than 7th October 2023. However, the number of deaths reported in Gaza is hugely underestimated, as figures calculated and published in the Lancet in June 2024 put the figure at 186,000 killed by Israel in Gaza as a conservative estimate.

Targeting healthcare

2023 was the deadliest year for healthcare on record. The Safeguarding Health in Conflict 2023 report released in May 2024 stated that there had been more attacks this year than ever documented before, most of which were committed by Israel in Gaza. In April, UNOCHA said "Gaza's health care system has been almost completely and systematically devastated and destroyed", however the bombing of Gaza, ground offensives, military blockade and psychological warfare tactics continue. **Healthcare in Gaza is forced to operate out of this state of complete destruction to preserve the lives of Palestinians facing genocide.**

Global Awareness

Over the last 300+ days, people all over the world have learnt more about the history, culture and geography of Palestine. Awareness of the crimes against humanity, settler-colonialism and technological warfare in the 21st Century has become commonplace among members of the public - and most importantly young people - forever. This issue is not unique to Palestine; neocolonial violence is perpetuated in conflicts all around the world, tied to imperialist powers including the UK, USA, Israel and Russia. These conflicts are often closely linked to natural resources, geopolitical motivations and authoritarian ideologies, eg. in Sudan, Ukraine, the DRC, Haiti, Armenia, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Ecuador, Western Sahara and many more.

In 2022, SfGH UK released a statement on the Russian invasion of Ukraine which detailed our condemnation for Russia's targeting of civilians, destruction of healthcare facilities and violations of international law. These principles apply to Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories too and reflect our stance on occupation everywhere. Many other NGO's in the UK have published statements on Palestine, such as: Amnesty, BOND, Healthworkers for a Free Palestine, Global Justice Now, Oxfam and StopAids. Further to information we have released on our social media accounts and at our events, we want to expand on our stance by releasing this public statement.

Brutal war crimes have been committed by the Israeli state throughout its existence, but increasingly so in the Gaza Strip and West Bank since 7th October 2023, as stated by UNHRC. The overwhelming majority of people who have been killed in Gaza are civilians and incriminating comments have been made by spokespeople for the IDF, including Daniel Hagari on 10th October who said that their strategy was to cause "maximum damage". To do so is an attack on the lives of civilians, and has been seen in an increase of atrocities taking place **across the occupied Palestinian territories**, not just in Gaza. Particular concern has been placed on the disproportionate number of women and children killed, because this shows there is a high civilian death toll which means that Israel is disregarding international law. The war on Gaza has also been called a "war on children" and a "war on women" by UN directors. In the first 4 months of its assault on Gaza alone, Israel killed more children than were killed in conflicts throughout the entire world over the last 4 years. After 6 months, the UN reported that 6,000 mothers had been killed, leaving 19,000 children behind as orphans. From the beginning, Israel has wiped out entire families, which is a war crime. Many children have to care for their younger siblings, after losing their parents, while others are now being identified by a new acronym 'WCNSF', which stands for "wounded child, no surviving family", in cases where all their siblings have been also killed. So many of these babies and children are too young to even know their own names.

According to OCHA, since the 7th of October 2023, Israel's ongoing assault on Gaza - including aerial bombardment, ground invasion and complete blockade - has resulted in:

- 40,500+ people killed - over 70% of whom are women (10,000+) and children (16,000+)
- 10,000+ people are presumed dead under the rubble
- 90,000+ are injured, although the true figures are estimated to be wildly higher
- 5,000+ have been permanently disabled - predicted to be another **huge underestimate**

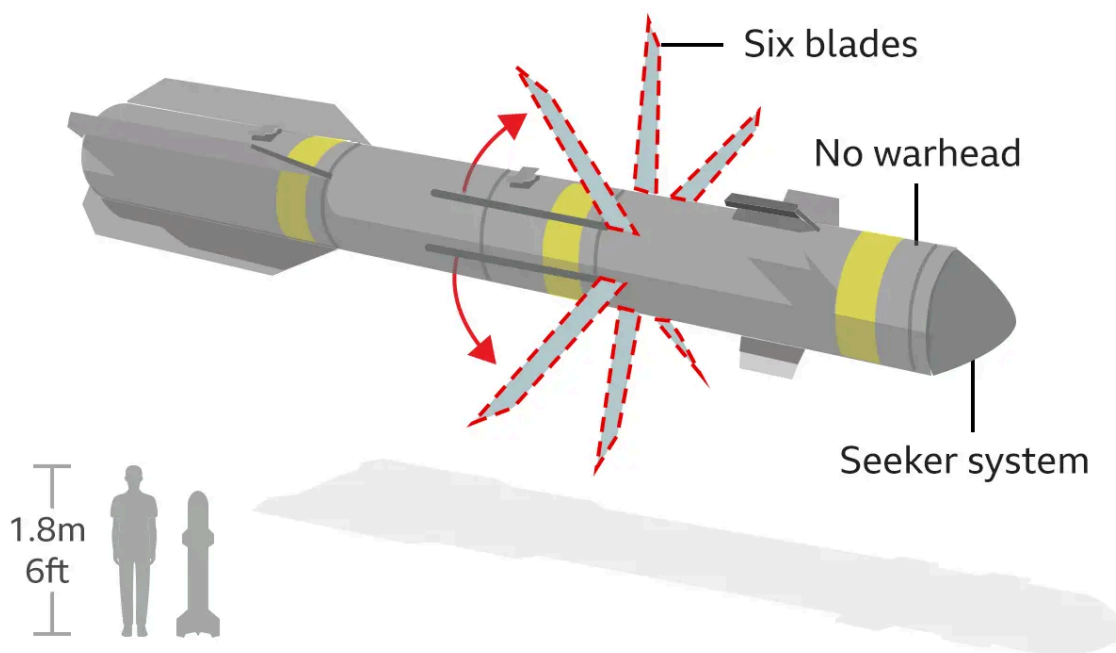
The Impact of Conflict on Civilian Life

Disability

130,000 people in the Gaza strip were already living with permanent disabilities before October 2023 due to the medical restrictions imposed by Israel and previous IDF assaults, comprising 21% of all households. This number is now much higher. Over 10 children a day lose a limb in Gaza, with many forced to undergo amputations without any anaesthesia or pain relief. Assistive devices and medical supplies were already chronically unavailable due to Israel's 16-year siege of Gaza, but their depletion has led to "the biggest cohort of paediatric amputees in history". After becoming an amputee, adults and children will have a reduced ability to move, evacuate and access lifesaving supplies, making their chances of survival in the Gaza strip even slimmer. They may also become less able to care for family members who depend on them. Israel is disabling huge numbers of Palestinian civilians. Horrifically, the Israeli military has intentionally been using weapons designed to bring about maximum injury, such as the Hellfire missile (image 1), which projects 6 blades to shred bodies on impact. Israel has used this weapon on hospitals in Gaza.

Image 1: The Hellfire Missile

Hellfire R9X missile



Source: BBC research



Another weapon Israel has used repeatedly in Gaza are white phosphorus bombs. These are illegal under international law as they burn flesh to the bone and cause long-term health impacts such as cancer. Israel has bombed occupied Palestine and other countries, such as Lebanon, with white phosphorus for decades, causing irreversible damage to land, air, water and animals.

Famine

In all societies, the burden of caring for children, the elderly and those with disabilities falls predominantly onto women and girls, and in conflict situations, women can face greater threats to their safety and security due to caregiving responsibilities. Mothers are more likely to sacrifice their food to feed their children. UN Women estimates that 60,000+ women are suffering from malnutrition in Gaza because 80% of mothers are skipping meals for the sake of their families. This concern is heightened as Israel has blocked almost 100% of aid, food, electricity and fuel from entering the Gaza strip since its initial attack. By December, the WHO reported that 93% of the population in Gaza was facing crisis levels of hunger, with at least 1 in 4 households living in "catastrophic conditions". The IPCC report in January warned of the evident risk of famine that will result in a death toll which far exceeds those directly killed by bombs or bullets. In January, UNICEF said that 335,000 children below the age of 5 in the Gaza Strip are now at risk of starving to death. In June, the UN said that 1 million Palestinians could be starved to death within a month. This is a collective punishment tactic which breaches international humanitarian law. As an occupier, Israel is responsible for safeguarding Palestinians. But the imposed famine, and the restriction of water, medications and critical supplies, proves they are doing the polar opposite.

Psychological Trauma

The dire mental health consequences of living under continuing blockade, constant aggression and military escalation had impacted generations of Palestinians. The mental health of people in Gaza was already in crisis due to Israel's treatment of Palestinians, particularly young people and children. Parents and carers also faced this trauma and did not have the necessary tools to support themselves or their dependants. Over twenty years ago, psychiatrists in the UK had to create a 'Gaza Traumatic Event Checklist' because of the high incidence of post-traumatic stress cases in Gazan children who had lived through an Israeli military assault. Save the Children investigated the repercussions of Israel's 15-year blockade on children's mental health in 2021 and found that more than half of parents reported their children were suicidal or self-harming. Evidence shows that since October, children's mental health has only been further destroyed, due to the bombing of civilian areas, including schools and hospitals, eradicating safe spaces, while Israel's siege of Gaza has cut off mental health services and destroyed coping strategies.

Child Health

We have witnessed first hand accounts of harrowing footage of starving children scraping flour off the ground for their families, searching for drops of salty water to quench their thirst or quaking, heavily traumatised, at the sound of fighter jets used to drop bombs flying over them. Children are 7 times more likely to be killed from blast injuries than adults, due to their size and development. On top of the confirmed 15,000 children who have been killed - including 2,000 babies and toddlers - 21,000 more are missing, either buried under the rubble (4,000) or lost, separated and unaccompanied (17,000). The impact on a child of witnessing scenes of destruction and loss brings about not only mental health crises, but can also exacerbate physical complications. The number of Palestinian children killed is more than double the average 20% death rate for children in conflicts, demonstrating how high the civilian death toll is. More than

10 children a day, on average, have lost one or both of their legs and over 1000 have had one or multiple limbs amputated, many with no pain relief at all. Young children are also more prone to contracting waterborne diseases and infections from unsanitary living conditions and there has been an outbreak of skin infections, including scabies, lice, chickenpox and impetigo. Diseases such as typhoid, cholera and diarrhoea, are also arising from the lack of sanitation, as 95% of Gaza's population have no access to clean water. UNICEF states that 3000 malnourished children are now at risk of dying, which is 75% of all children in the south of Gaza. This is where Israel committed its recent tent massacre in Rafah, which was already named the "site of silent killings" because the block of medical care has resulted in huge numbers of preventable deaths.

Reproductive Health

This report, published in March, details how Israel has imposed "dire living conditions" in the Gaza Strip since October 2023 that prevent births and increase complications during pregnancy. Over 180 women in Gaza are giving birth everyday, with no access to adequate food or water, medical attention or facilities for them and their babies and with humanitarian aid restricted and denied. Reproductive health, along with the safety and privacy of all women and girls is in crisis because of the lack of WASH facilities, which is even worse than it was before 7th October 2023. Some have even resorted to using hormonal methods to artificially delay menstruation when they can access it, although this has sometimes shown adverse side effects. The siege imposed by Israel has created conditions of period poverty where menstrual hygiene products and basic sanitation facilities are denied, putting women and girls at greater risk of infectious diseases and adding to the burden on the already decimated health care system. This issue is not just in the Gaza Strip but across all Palestinian territories and all Palestinians need reproductive justice.

The Targeting of the Healthcare System

Since October, healthcare staff, such as MSF surgeon Dr Nedal Abed, have stated that the healthcare system in the Gaza Strip is on the verge of collapse, and things have become unimaginably worse during the 11 months of continual military onslaught since. Correspondence published in the Lancet in November called upon the international community to protect civilian healthcare workers, after 57 healthcare facilities were attacked in the first 3 weeks of bombing of Gaza and 73 healthcare professionals were killed. As of February, there had been 600 attacks on healthcare facilities in occupied Palestinian territories, 370 of which occurred in the Gaza Strip. After only 7 months, 25 of the 36 hospitals in the Gaza strip had been completely destroyed and the rest left only partially functioning with "severe limitations of the services they can deliver". Over the past 11 months, Israel has destroyed almost all aspects of the healthcare system in the Gaza Strip, as well as targeting healthcare workers and patients, which is a breach of the international humanitarian law that was established to protect civilians in conflict. There have been countless documented instances where Israel has committed Human Rights' abuses against Palestinians, which have been disproportionately unacknowledged or underreported in mainstream Western media coverage. Israel's siege of Gaza for 16 years has restricted items essential for healthcare, such as medicines and equipment, alongside other necessities, such as food, water and electricity. On 9th October this siege was intensified to a full blockade, meaning

that for 11 months Israel has prevented almost all aid, equipment and resources from entering Gaza. This has been condemned by António Guterres as Israel's attempt to collectively punish Palestinians - a recognised war crime. Additionally, international attempts to deliver aid to Gaza have been thwarted or denied by Israel and the only two border crossings have been closed.

In the Gaza Strip, Israel has also attacked ambulances, shelters and schools, as well as essential infrastructure such as water desalination plants, bakeries, greenhouses and warehouses for aid. 60-80% of domestic and commercial buildings have been razed to the ground and 90% of Gaza's population has been displaced. Evidence shows that Israel has targeted sites despite knowing they are populated with civilians. Palestinians from Gaza have been abused and killed by the IDF in camps, including through sexual assault. Evidence also shows that Israeli doctors have been involved in the torture of Palestinians inside hospitals. In the West Bank, attacks on civilians by IDF soldiers and violence from settlers have also risen, which has involved the targeting of hospitals, ambulances, patients and healthcare staff. Testimonies recount healthcare workers being attacked at known aid locations and subsequently tortured, abducted and killed.

Healthcare Workers

Targeting healthcare facilities endangers the lives of the most vulnerable in society, namely pregnant women, children, the elderly and those with disabilities. As of 10th May 2024, throughout Palestine, 514 healthcare workers have been killed, 244 have been taken hostage by the IDF and 43 are missing. Israel was also aware that thousands of people in Gaza were using hospitals to shelter for safety when they targeted them. Many hospitals were the site of horrific attacks by the IDF including aerial bombings, ground invasions and mass executions. These include using quadcopter drones and machine guns to shoot at people inside hospitals. There are testimonies of healthcare staff being kidnapped and abused that document violence, murder and sexual assault at the hands of the IDF inside Israeli prisons and even hospitals. Despite being bombed, forensic teams in Gaza have already begun to uncover the crimes committed by Israel in hospitals. So far, 16 mass graves, including women and children, have been found in Gaza's hospitals. Some contain hundreds of people, and some decapitated bodies. In Al-Shifa hospital, which was founded in 1946 - 2 years before the establishment of an Israeli state - bodies of healthcare workers were found with torture marks, their hands tied and shots to the head.

The following are 458 of the 514 healthcare personnel killed across Palestine from 7th October 2023 - 14th June 2024 (Healthcare Workers Watch), meaning in both Gaza and the West Bank:

- Nurses and midwives: 161
- Physicians: 87
- Paramedics: 55
- Pharmacists: 47
- Occupational/physiotherapists: 39
- Dentists: 42
- Medical & dental students: 34
- Health administration staff: 31
- Lab technicians: 18
- Optometrists: 11
- Medical scientists: 7
- Psychologists: 5
- Anaesthesia technicians: 2
- Dental & radiology technicians: 2

We have seen a **global solidarity movement in support of healthcare workers in Palestine**, who are providing care and treatment for their patients despite undergoing a genocide (eg. HAP, HCWfP, HW4FP). Those in Gaza are faced with continuous land, air and sea strikes, but even prior to October, they were forced to provide care under the physical and mental stress of occupation and denial of resources. Now this means working under unimaginable conditions; with bullets, bombs, starvation and a lack of equipment. Alongside healthcare professionals, journalists and media workers, vital services have also been targeted, in breach of international humanitarian law. These are the direct impacts of Israeli attacks so far, but the long-term health implications will affect Palestinians for generations. The biggest proportion of deaths and casualties are predicted to come in the next few months from the forced starvation, dehydration and medical neglect imposed on Gaza by Israel. These indirect deaths are estimated to outnumber those directly killed by bombs and bullets and will continue even after a ceasefire happens.

Everyone, including healthcare staff, should be expected to condemn these atrocities.

Dr Ghassan Abu Sitta has referred to the actions of the Israeli military in Gaza as enacting "**genocidal medicine**", because they directly attack the Palestinian healthcare system. Evidence from the WHO in early 2023 shows that Palestinians living **in all occupied territories** had long faced discrimination accessing healthcare and at the hands of Israeli healthcare staff due to the apartheid system of state provision. Organisations that provide healthcare in both Gaza and the West Bank have had their healthcare facilities, workers, ambulances and patients targeted. This not only ruins personal lives, but threatens the survival of whole communities. When healthcare workers are targeted, their ability to provide care for others stops. There have been **over 1,000 attacks on healthcare** in Gaza and the West Bank in the last 11 months, the highest number recorded from any conflict ever. This includes many instances of targeting the vital services of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society. As of 14th June, 251 healthcare workers and 8 students had been unlawfully detained by Israel across Gaza and the West Bank since 7th October 2023.

The Use of Artificial Intelligence

Weaponized artificial intelligence has further **exacerbated the war crimes committed by Israel**. According to the UN, there is a strong correlation between massive civilian deaths and destruction, with the use of AI technology in warfare. Three Israeli AI systems, known as 'Lavender', 'Where's Daddy?' and 'The Gospel', were used to select most of the 15,000 civilians killed in the first 6 weeks after 7th October. Israel's use of this AI technology enables its military to target family homes, public buildings and residential blocks for maximum civilian destruction. Israeli intelligence officers involved in using this AI to bomb Palestinians in the Gaza strip say they called these 'garbage targets' because of their huge deliberate collateral damage. Many organisations, including the UN, Doctors without Borders (MSF), Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters without Borders (RSF) confirm that journalists, aid workers and healthcare professionals have been targeted with the use of AI, breaking international law. It is highly likely

that AI technologies were used to help target these individuals either alongside their families or in civilian locations, causing devastating damage. Below is some more information:

- AI system Lavender creates 'kill lists' based off algorithms, aided by Meta's Whatsapp;
- Journalists face cyberattacks, censorship and targeting at work and at home;
- The Israeli spyware Pegasus is used to track the movements of journalists in Gaza;
- The Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate says 96 of 107 journalists were targeted in this way;
- Aid convoys and emergency vehicles with workers, supplies and patients have been hit, despite and likely due to the Israeli military being provided with their exact locations;
- This is the highest proportion of journalists and UN workers killed in a conflict ever.

In the West Bank, Israel has been using AI technologies for years to conduct mass surveillance without consent, particularly at checkpoints. Amnesty International published a report on this over a year ago, detailing how it enables Israeli apartheid. Additionally, Israel tests weapons and new technologies on Palestinians, even those that have been condemned by the **UN**. Israel's attack on Gaza in 2021 was coined the "first artificial intelligence war" by the IDF as they began testing AI weapons, which they later sold on to other states. AccessNow has detailed Human Rights' abuses and war crimes perpetrated by Israel and data companies through AI technologies. These are incompatible with peace and social justice. In terms of the UK, data contractor Palantir, known for its recent business contract with the NHS, helps provide surveillance technology to Israel, including working on militarising artificial intelligence. Its NHS contract to handle patient data has faced widespread condemnation, because of the company's public support for Israel over the last 8 months, its lack of transparency and its involvement in intelligence systems used to arrest and profile Palestinians through their META social media accounts. Microsoft also contributes services to both the IDF and Israeli prison system.

Incorporating AI into warfare is not limited to Israel; China uses similar technologies to surveil its Uyghur population in Xinjiang province, as has the USA for its drone strikes in several countries. However, Israel's military is surpassing norms of AI use by its complete disregard for civilian life.

We urge governments to regulate AI technologies, as well as companies and universities to cease financial investments and research contracts that support the development of AI-enhanced weapons. Examples include 'Project Nimbus', an Amazon- and Google-backed cloud initiative serving the Israeli military. We want to see systemic change on an international level to ensure that the UK's diplomatic relations, policies and leaders do not support the imperialist aims of settler-colonialism, resource extraction, Human Rights' violations and healthcare destruction.

SfGH UK agrees that healthcare should be considered first and foremost as a necessity under any circumstances, especially in conflict settings. Ensuring access to healthcare, in line with the WHO, means upholding the right to life, with nobody excluded or left behind.

Case Study - One Attack on Rafah

As an occupier on Palestinian land, the state of Israel is required to protect all Palestinians under International Law, but it is in blatant violation of this. Evidence of the double standards between Palestinian and Israeli citizens have existed for decades, with the implementation of apartheid as differential treatment enshrined in law. Israel has repeatedly disregarded Human Rights law and the law of armed conflict without repercussions. There have been accounts of war crimes being committed by Israel both since and long before 7th October 2023. For decades, healthcare for Palestinians in the Gaza strip and West Bank has been severely obstructed by Israeli occupation and this is becoming more severe. Since October, the state of Israel has further restricted access to life saving and life sustaining resources, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Oxfam called this a "deliberate humanitarian catastrophe". Governments all over the world, including here in the UK, have allowed this to happen by failing to take action, ignoring legal advice and restricting the public right to protest violations of international law. Western countries, especially those who participated in the colonisation, exploitation and extraction of Palestinian land, such as the UK, USA and many European countries, have a responsibility to act now to safeguard Palestinians.

There have been so many abhorrent attacks in the last 11 months that we cannot document them all. Here is more information on just one attack by Israel in the Gaza Strip. This should be a reminder of the experience of so many populations around the world who face targeting, abuse and ethnic cleansing at the hands of occupying powers, extremist groups and other militias.

The most recent developments have seen the Israeli military launching attacks in and around Rafah. Rafah is the southernmost city in the Gaza strip and also the site of a border crossing with Egypt, used to provide vital humanitarian aid. Israel told Palestinians to flee to Rafah for 6 months, claiming it would be a "safe zone", while it launched attacks almost everywhere else in the Gaza strip. Last year, the population of Rafah was roughly 280,000 but has since risen to over 1.4 million. UNICEF now describe it as a "city of children", because a large proportion of displaced Palestinians are so young, that they make up about 50% of the population in Rafah.

On May 6th, a ceasefire deal proposed by Egypt and Qatar, and accepted by Hamas, was refused by Israel. The IDF then began bombing the city and entered the outskirts. By 14th May, forces were entering the most populated areas. Nearly one million people were forced to flee again to areas already deemed unsafe. Mohammed Al Khatib details how this is the ninth time his family was displaced, and how even in the 'humanitarian zone' they are still surrounded by the sounds of Israeli attacks. All three hospitals in Rafah have been put out of action, leaving 400,000 people trapped with no access to healthcare, as pre-existing medical supplies are almost exhausted.

Israel seized and closed the Gazan side of the Rafah crossing, denying life-saving humanitarian aid to those already lacking essential supplies. Due to this disastrous humanitarian situation, the ICJ ordered Israel to stop the offensive on the 24th May, based on "Israel's obligations under the convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide". Israel refused to do so.

On 27th May, an Israeli air strike targeted a refugee camp for displaced Palestinians just outside Rafah, which it had claimed was a "safe zone" no more than a week before. At least 45 people were killed in one strike that was conducted without any prior warning or evacuation orders. This sequence of events has been used in Gaza repeatedly for the IDF, leading camp residents to falsely believe they are safe before bombing them. Zahair, a lawyer living in the camp, described "Bodies everywhere. Children burning. I saw heads without bodies, the injured running around in pain, some alive but trapped inside burning tents." The WHO called this an "attack on displaced people" and said there was not enough medical supplies available to deal with such a disaster.

Our Stance

Destroying the health system in Gaza denies not only current Palestinians their right to health, but also subsequent generations. Future populations will be born into a community who have had their basic means of survival destroyed, just as generations of Palestinians have historically been denied their basic human rights including access to necessities like food, water and medical care. Furthermore, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the global health sector has become acutely aware of the impact that outbreaks of disease can have on existing healthcare systems. Decimating the capacity of a nation's healthcare system leaves it not only unable to care for its patients, but also unable to respond to any adverse emergency situation, such as a pandemic.

Head of the UN António Guterres has stated that "the people of Gaza are living in a waking nightmare"; this should be a warning call for all international actors who want to stand for equality and Human Rights. As an organisation, Students for Global Health UK (SfGH) wants Israel to agree to a ceasefire, lift their siege on Gaza and end their colonial occupation and apartheid rule of historic Palestine. Many organisations have expressed their condemnation of Israel's system of apartheid and settler-colonial occupation, and we stand with them. In February, 62 NGO's from the UK signed a letter asking our government to support a ceasefire in Gaza and more recently, over 30 healthcare workers from the UK who volunteered in Gaza since October wrote a letter to the UK government to demand that they stop arming Israel. Instead, it has been international communities and countries in the Global South who have been at the forefront of solidarity with Palestine and we support their efforts that turn words into actions for restorative justice. Failing to bring an end to the brutal bombing and besieging of Gaza is a **failure of leaders worldwide** and for the future of health and humanity. As we strive for health equity across the lifecourse, this stance reflects our opinion as an organisation which believes in upholding Human Rights, universal access to healthcare and International Humanitarian Law.

This is not just about peace but about justice.

SfGH's calls for the UK...

Government

SfGH UK calls on the UK Government to:

1. **Support a permanent ceasefire** in Gaza that includes the release of all hostages and people in administrative detention, both Palestinian and Israeli;
2. **Demand an end to the siege** on Gaza with unrestricted access to humanitarian aid and medical care and be instrumental in **ending Israeli occupation**;
3. Stop all arms' sales to the state of Israel on account of the evidence of war crimes;
4. Publicly support the ICJ's ruling and put international pressure on Israel to abide by it;
5. Acknowledge the genocide and **recognise Palestinians' right to self-determination**.

1. The destruction of human life in Palestine has, and is being directly aided and abetted by the UK, the USA and other imperialist states, who supply weapons and military personnel to Israel, as well as providing political, diplomatic and economic support. The UK's actions mirror its colonial legacy and are antithetical to peace in the state of Palestine. We are dismayed by the complicity of our political leaders who fail to act in line with the principles of Human Rights'. Over the last 8 months, political negligence from our world leaders has only resulted in us delaying peace and justice for everyone in historic Palestine. In all corners of society, people have asked the UK government to call for a ceasefire and end to Israeli occupation, stop sending weapons to Israel, allow the reunification of Palestinians with family members in the UK and permit the travel of injured children to the UK for medical care. Many members of parliament and legal experts have joined these calls to action.

2. 1,100 UK lawyers wrote letters to the prime minister and UK parliament on 26 October, 9 November, 14 November and 3 April stating that Israel is breaking International Humanitarian law by targeting civilians and collectively punishing the Palestinian people. It took more than 6 months for the first ceasefire resolution to be passed by the UN Security Council, mainly due to blocks and abstentions from the UK and USA. The Geneva Conventions, established in response to the horrors of the Holocaust, demands that the UK act to **prevent genocide** when there is a suspected risk of it occurring. The UK is bound to not violate - or assist other countries in violating - International Law, which evidence suggests the UK has been doing on behalf of Israel since and prior to 7th October, by selling arms and providing logistical military assistance and intelligence.

3. Countless Humanitarian aid organisations, international NGO's, Human Rights' lawyers, healthcare professionals, investigative journalists, teachers, writers and other professionals have stated that Israel's actions constitute genocide, ethnic cleansing and forced displacement, all of which are **war crimes** under International Law. Within the first week of the Israeli assault on Gaza, 800 scholars from UN officials and international lawyers to Jewish civil society groups (including Holocaust survivors) and genocide studies' experts warned that Israel is committing genocide. These acts are further sustained by state and corporate actors, such as arms' companies, weapons' manufacturers and the tech industry, that render the international

humanitarian and healthcare communities powerless. Comprehensive proof of this has recently been submitted to the UN.

Many civil society groups, including those specific to healthcare workers (Health Workers for a Free Palestine (UK), Health Workers 4 Palestine and Healthcare Workers for Palestine) have come together to call for a ceasefire and demand the UK government stop arming Israel, in solidarity with their Palestinian colleagues. SfGH UK stands with them and deplores the use of collective punishment, targetting of civilians, sexual violence, abductions and environmental destruction, all of which contravene the rules of war. Countries who have brought cases against Israel at the ICJ and ICC since October have provided countless evidence of these violations being committed.

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Universities

SfGH UK calls on UK Universities to:

1. **Divest** from arms' companies, weapons manufacturers and technological warfare;
2. **Condemn** Israeli war crimes and acknowledge scholasticide in Gaza;
3. **Stop censoring** pro-Palestinian voices on campus and safeguard student activism.

1. Whilst the education system in Palestine is undergoing "systemic obliteration", UK universities are continuing to fund the state of Israel and their military agenda. We have recently seen an outpouring of support for Palestinians around the world by students calling for their universities to divest and disaffiliate from institutions that are supporting the Israeli regime, including arms manufacturers, Israeli institutions of higher education and technology companies that assist in the creation of artificial intelligence weapons. In February, Campaign Against the Arms' Trade (CAAT) and Demilitarise Education (dED) published a report on the growing links between UK universities and arms' companies. It states that research collaborations which fuel the UK's military industrial complex are increasing and leading students into careers in the arms industry.

Student encampments have emerged throughout the world as a method of protest demanding that universities divest from companies and investments that profit from the sale of weapons and Israeli apartheid. There have been student groups encamping at 36 universities in the UK. We stand in solidarity with students and staff asking their universities to divest from companies aiding Israeli war crimes and cease their complicity in other atrocities around the world.

Over 100 universities around the UK have committed to divest from fossil fuels. To truly honour this commitment, these institutions must also divest from the arms industry, which is responsible for hugely disproportionate levels of pollution worldwide. Not only does conflict immediately harm health and health systems, but it causes climate degradation which results in long-term adverse health outcomes.

2. Israel has bombed every single university in Gaza and 88,000 university students have no university to go back to. 100 academics in Gaza were killed by January and 555 Palestinian students were prevented from taking up scholarships abroad. This threatens the future of Palestinian scholarship and has been widely condemned as scholasticide, committed by Israel and supported by the UK and USA. Academics from Gaza signed a letter stating their ambition to rebuild the Gazan higher education system and calling out the UK for promoting and aiding Israeli scholasticide.

3. Palestinian and pro-Palestinian students in the UK have faced disproportionate censorship for years, exacerbated by the Prevent strategy and contested IHRA definition of antisemitism. UK Universities must respect students' right to protest in line with UK law, respond in an appropriate manner that acknowledges their financial ties and academic contributions to Israel and engage in negotiations with students with the intention of divesting and fully disclosing their investments.

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Medical Institutions

SfGH UK calls on UK medical institutions to:

1. Publicly **declare solidarity** with Palestinian healthcare workers, especially in Gaza;
2. **Support educational schemes** to help Gazan medical students resume their studies;
3. Join efforts to **provide safe passage** for Gazan children to receive medical care in the UK;

1. Doctors, nurses, paramedics and all other healthcare staff in Gaza have demonstrated bravery, resilience and integrity beyond belief. Some unprecedented issues they deal with at the hands of the Israeli state include the near total restriction of medical devices, medicines and equipment due to the imposed blockade, which existed since 2016 but was worsened on 9th October 2023. Likewise, the facilitation of transport for patients abroad for treatment, including their safe passage out of Gaza is systematically denied by Israel. In the West Bank, increased attacks on healthcare also threaten the lives and efforts of healthcare staff. Healthcare workers in the UK have faced resistance when trying to organise events, raise awareness or call for accountability in Palestine. The standards used to justify the silencing of UK healthcare voices completely contradict its solidarity for Ukraine. NHS staff have been repressed from displaying solidarity with Palestinians and this is an inexcusable demonstration of bias against the core egalitarian values of medicine. UK medical institutions should support and further their employees' efforts to safeguard human life and the healthcare profession.

2. Medical students and faculty members across the UK have organised the Medical Schools Gaza Solidarity Group for students and staff to mobilise for Palestinian solidarity. Pal Med Europe has established the Gaza Education Medics (GEM) scheme, which already enabled Gazan medical students to resume their qualifications in Gaza and abroad. Watch their webinars so far: <https://www.youtube.com/@medschoolsgazasolidaritygroup>.

3. The UK government has denied critically injured Palestinian children from receiving treatment in the UK, despite efforts from doctors and NHS staff to provide treatment pathways. This has been called "medical racism" because visas, travel grants and medical care have been granted to children from conflict zones before, including over 100 children from Ukraine. The scale of casualties in Gaza, along with the thousands suffering from starvation and dehydration demands a response on a global scale. Over 10,000 people need evacuation from Rafah alone in order to be treated for severe burns, trauma, malnutrition and dehydration. The UK in particular needs to demonstrate international accountability by treating Palestinian survivors of this genocide with dignity because of the UK's complicity in, and contributions towards, Israel's military operations.

What Can I Do?

We encourage readers to take action now and stand in solidarity with Palestinians by supporting initiatives in the UK and abroad, including providing mutual aid, vital services and lifesaving medical supplies to Palestinians, particularly in Gaza. **Please share these resources widely!**

Stay Informed

These instagram accounts give verified healthcare testimonies from Gaza:

- [@gazamedicvoices](#)
- [@healthcareworkerswatch](#)
- [@jvphealthadvisorycouncil](#)
- [@healthworkers4palestine](#)
- [@amiranimerawi](#)
- [@dr.ghassan.as](#)
- [@jimble_jay](#)
- [@nervesurgeon](#)
- [@ezz.lulu](#)

UK solidarity groups to FOLLOW:

- Medical Schools Gaza Solidarity Group: [@medschoolsgazasolidaritygroup](#)
- BMA for a Free Palestine: [@bmaforafreepalestine](#)
- Health Workers for a Free Palestine: [@hw4fp](#)
- Queers for Palestine: [@queers.for.palestine](#)

Actions and Events

Other things you can do to help...

DONATE to Pal Med Europe's Gaza Education Medics (GEM) scheme ([more information](#)) which has already enabled some Gazan medical students to resume their qualifications either in Gaza or abroad: <https://www.kindlink.com/fundraising/PALMED-UK/gem>

BUY an e-sim for Gazans: <https://linktr.ee/connectgaza>

GIVE to medical aid relief efforts in Gaza: <https://www.map.org.uk/>

SHARE mutual aid platforms to help families: <https://linktr.ee/opolivebranch>

SUPPORT the BDS movement: <https://bdsmovement.net/get-involved/what-to-boycott>

FOLLOW student activism: <https://www.instagram.com/londonstudentspalestine/>

ATTEND events for Palestine in your local area: <https://palestinecampaign.org/events/>

READ books by Palestinian authors: <https://palestinianyouthmovement.com/reading-list>

WATCH this recording: <https://www.palfest.org/full-schedule/how-empires-end>

ADVOCATE for Palestine:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cynZr2F3j4QK2LoiKkQc9vIwRAf8KANg/view>

CALL for the release of abducted Palestinian healthcare workers:

<https://www.change.org/p/release-abducted-palestinian-healthcare-workers>

SIGN this letter to the BMA:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd6l5SHseUS-B2VtKhDyNxGucCiLMVm4Esc4gpy4jz8fGPY_g/viewform