

July 18, 2025, Brussels, Belgium

# Statement by the European public health community on Gaza

As European and international public health organisations, we, the undersigned, raise our collective voice in response to the ongoing and systematic devastation of Gaza and the West Bank by the Israeli authorities, with devastating public health consequences for the Palestinian people, including killing, starvation, and forced displacement. Rooted in public health science, humanitarian ethics, and our shared commitment to health as a human right, we express our grave concern over the scale and intensity of the destruction being wrought by the Israeli Defense Forces, creating a virtually complete collapse of the health and social systems in Gaza. We urge an immediate end to the hostilities and coordinated international measures to address the consequences of this humanitarian and public health catastrophe.

## Deliberate public health destruction

We recognise the overwhelming and growing body of evidence pointing to the systematic targeting of civilians, health and education infrastructure, and essential services in Gaza. We note the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice in early 2024 requiring Israel to take all steps to prevent acts of genocide, noting that allegations of genocide by the Israeli government were plausible. Since then, continuing attacks on Gaza have provided even more evidence of serious human rights abuses. Consequently, assessments by UN Special Rapporteurs<sup>[1]</sup> and the UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry,<sup>[2]</sup> supported by evidence collected by leading human rights and genocide prevention organisations,<sup>[3][4][5]</sup> now characterise the ongoing situation as one involving serious violations of international law that now, in the view of many experts, cross the high threshold for the crime of genocide.

The consequences for public health are catastrophic, long-term, and intergenerational. Before the current assault, Gaza's health system demonstrated extraordinary resilience under 17 years of blockade, maintaining maternal and child health services, vaccination programmes, and training future health workers despite severe restrictions on supplies, equipment, and training. This was not a failing system; it was a surviving one. What we are witnessing now is not the collapse of fragile infrastructure but its deliberate and systematic destruction. The targeted bombing of hospitals, clinics, ambulances, and the killing of health workers has erased decades

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of public health progress - a generational loss inflicted with intent. Life expectancy in Gaza has reportedly fallen by over 30 years.<sup>[6]</sup> More than 80% of Gaza's infrastructure is destroyed,<sup>[7]</sup> including hospitals, water and sanitation systems, and the majority of schools.<sup>[8]</sup> Over 1,400 health workers<sup>[9]</sup> and almost 300 UN staff<sup>[10]</sup> have been killed. Children face record levels of trauma, amputations, and psychological harm, with nearly half reportedly expressing a wish to die.<sup>[11]</sup> These indicators are not merely collateral damage; they reflect the systemic collapse of health determinants and constitute a grave breach of the right to health.

We also recognise the serious and escalating health impacts of settler violence and state-supported attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where communities face displacement, restrictions on access to healthcare, and targeted destruction of health-related infrastructure. These acts further compound the wider public health crisis affecting the Palestinian people.

## An ethical duty to speak

Neutrality in the face of serious human rights abuses is complicity and where genocide is taking place, the international community has a responsibility, set out in the Genocide Convention, to protect the victims. Organisations in our community have spoken individually on this crisis, including the most recent statement by ASPHER<sup>[12]</sup> reaffirming the responsibilities of the public health community. Today, we step forward with a united voice, recognising that the scale and severity of this ongoing atrocity require collective, unequivocal action. Echoing the bold leadership of WHO and Dr Tedros,<sup>[13]</sup> the public health community has a responsibility to speak up when patterns of destruction and suffering threaten the very foundations of population health. Silence and selective action erode public trust, institutional credibility, and the principle that all lives have equal value.

In this spirit, we:

- Note the accumulating evidence that the actions of the Israeli state have moved beyond what the International Court of Justice were plausible genocide now meet the definition in the Genocide Convention, with the resulting responsibility of the international community to protect the victims. Condemn the deliberate and systematic targeting of health infrastructure and health workers by the Israel Defense Forces
- Affirm the equal value of all human lives while standing firmly with the Palestinian people in the face of ongoing atrocities. While this statement focuses on the public health catastrophe in Gaza, we do not ignore the suffering of Israeli hostages and their families. Acknowledging this suffering does not negate the broader

devastation in Gaza, nor can it be used to justify ongoing violations of international law. All civilians, regardless of their nationality or circumstance, deserve protection and compassion. We condemn racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia in all their forms.

## Call for urgent action

We call on governments, international institutions, and donors to:

1. Take all possible measures to secure an immediate and lasting ceasefire and ensure unfettered humanitarian and media access to Gaza
2. Call on the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and relevant UN bodies to accelerate their ongoing investigation into violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by both the parties to the conflict and those who, through military and material support to them, are complicit in these violations
3. Prioritise the protection and restoration of public health systems and social infrastructure
4. Measure and address the full scale of the public health impacts, including:
  - Widespread physical and psychological trauma, including among children<sup>[11]</sup>
  - Exacerbation of chronic diseases due to disruption of care and medications<sup>[14]</sup>
  - Collapse of maternal, newborn and child health services<sup>[15]</sup>
  - Emergence and spread of infectious diseases, exacerbated by overcrowding, poor sanitation, and the breakdown of vaccination programmes<sup>[14]</sup>
  - Environmental health threats from rubble, unexploded ordnance, and lack of clean water<sup>[16]</sup>
  - Mass displacement<sup>[17]</sup> and deterioration of food and nutrition security<sup>[18][19]</sup>

## Solidarity with displaced health professionals, researchers and students

We urge (public) health associations, universities, and institutions across Europe and beyond to support displaced and persecuted health workers, students, and researchers from Gaza. This includes:

- Providing academic sanctuary and scholarships
- Offering employment, training and research opportunities
- Advocating for the protection of academic freedom and professional dignity

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## A united voice for health and humanity

We, the undersigned, refuse to remain silent in the face of mass atrocity and the deliberate destruction of health and life. We reaffirm our commitment to public health principles, to justice, and to the inherent dignity of all people.

We also call on medical institutions, journals, and media outlets, particularly in Europe, to critically examine their own roles in shaping narratives and setting priorities. The selective visibility of suffering, the silencing of Palestinian voices, and the failure of many professional bodies to speak out reflect deeper patterns of systemic bias. Public health cannot remain credible if it turns away from mass atrocities.

We urge all sectors of our field to uphold their ethical duties with courage, integrity, and transparency.

Health requires peace. Silence is not neutrality.

The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)

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