

# Public Health in Peril: Assessing the Impact of Ongoing Conflict in Gaza Strip (Palestine) and Advocating Immediate Action to Halt Atrocities

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**Background:** The protracted Israel-Palestine conflict has once again escalated, resulting in a dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza Strip (Palestine). This brief report aims to provide an objective overview of the historical roots of the conflict, its impact on public health, and a call to action to end the ongoing atrocities.

**Methods:** A literature search was conducted on PubMed, focusing on the period after the recent escalation in October 2023. Seven relevant papers were identified, serving as primary sources for this analysis.

**Results:** We begin by presenting an unbiased historical account of the Israel-Palestine conflict and tracing its origins to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This historical context forms the foundation for comprehending the current crisis and the urgent appeal for humanitarian intervention. The escalating violence has placed immense strain on the healthcare system in Gaza Strip (Palestine), resulting in overwhelmed hospitals, critically low medical supplies, and severe hardships for healthcare workers. Furthermore, the civilian population, especially children, bears the brunt of the conflict, with high casualties and long-term trauma. Urgent calls for a ceasefire, protection of civilians, and the immediate delivery of humanitarian aid are emphasized. Finally, the necessity of addressing these issues through an objective academic lens is emphasized to foster a deeper understanding of multifaceted conflict.

**Conclusion:** The catastrophic impact of ongoing conflict in the Gaza Strip (Palestine) on public health is undeniable. Immediate action is imperative to halt atrocities, protect civilian lives, and support medical personnel in their life-saving mission. The call for an objective evaluation of the complex factors at play transcends historical grievances and political differences.

**Keywords:** Doctors Without Frontiers, Emergency, Genocide, Global Health, Humanitarian Crisis, Peace, Violence, War

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## INTRODUCTION

The conflict between Israel and Palestine, characterized by periodic escalations and de-escalations, has a long and deeply rooted history (1-7). Dating back years, this territorial dispute has seen alternating phases of tension and relative calm (1-7). In October 2023, the world finds itself witnessing a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza Strip (Palestine). On October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, the Islamic resistance movement (*ie*; Hamas), a Palestinian militant group, initiated an attack on Israel, marking a significant escalation in the ongoing conflict (8). Their actions included launching rockets, conducting raids on Israeli towns and military bases, and taking hostages, which included civilians (8). In response to these attacks, Israel commenced a series of airstrikes on Gaza Strip (Palestine) (8). Additionally, Israel imposed restrictions

on the supply of essential resources such as food, water, and electricity to the Gaza Strip (Palestine) (8). Israel reported that it had conducted more than 6000 bombing runs in Gaza Strip (Palestine) since the onset of these hostilities (8). The United Nations (UN) office for the coordination of humanitarian affairs, as of October 12<sup>th</sup>, reported that intense Israeli bombardments, involving air, sea, and land-based attacks, had been ongoing across Gaza Strip (Palestine) with little interruption (9). This resulted in the destruction of multiple residential buildings in densely populated areas (8). On October 19, 2023, the UN experts decry bombing of hospitals and schools as crimes against humanity and called for prevention of genocide (10).

It is critical to emphasize the urgent need for a cessation of violence in the middle of this intensifying conflict in order to safeguard civilian lives and prosperity (1-3). As healthcare professionals and advocates for global health, the authors express deep concern about the escalating violence and its devastating impact on the people of Gaza Strip (Palestine) (1-3). This brief report constitutes a pressing humanitarian appeal to all organizations, whether medical or non-medical, urging collective efforts to preserve the lives of the people in Gaza Strip (Palestine).

## METHODS

We searched *PubMed* on October 24, 2023, using the keyword [Gaza [Title/Abstract]] and limiting the research to the period after October 7, 2023. Only seven papers (1-7) discussed the issue of the humanitarian actions to halt violence and genocide in Gaza Strip (Palestine). Table 1 exposes the main messages of the aforementioned seven studies.

**Table 1.** Main messages of the seven studies raising the humanitarian actions to halt violence and genocide in Gaza Strip (Palestine).

Paper (reference)	Main message
Salmiya MA. Urgent humanitarian call to save lives in Gaza. <i>Lancet</i> . 2023. (1)	An urgent humanitarian plea to save lives in Gaza Strip (Palestine) amid the ongoing crisis.
Elessi K. Save Gaza residents from imminent catastrophe. <i>Lancet</i> . 2023. (2)	Call to prevent an impending catastrophe and save residents in Gaza Strip (Palestine).
Correia T. Two urgent actions related to international health emergencies amid the escalating conflict in Gaza. <i>Int J Health Plann Manage</i> . 2023. (3)	Urgent actions needed in response to escalating health emergencies in Gaza Strip (Palestine).
Givaty G, et al. Insights from the nearest Israeli hospital to the Gaza Strip. <i>Lancet</i> . 2023. (4)	Providing insights from the nearest Israeli hospital to Gaza Strip (Palestine), highlighting the healthcare situation.
Mahase E. Gaza: "Unprecedented" bombing of hospital leaves hundreds dead and injured. <i>Bmj</i> . 2023;383:2423. (5)	Report on the unprecedented bombing of a hospital in Gaza Strip (Palestine) and the resulting casualties.
Mahase E. Gaza: Israel's hospital evacuation orders are "death sentence for the sick," says WHO. <i>Bmj</i> . 2023;383:p2397. (6)	Criticism of hospital evacuation orders as detrimental to the health of the sick in Gaza Strip (Palestine), as per world health organization.
Mahase E. Israel and Gaza: MSF calls for end to "indiscriminate violence and collective punishment". <i>Bmj</i> . 2023;383:p2383. (7)	Doctors without borders's call to cease indiscriminate violence and collective punishment in Israel and Gaza Strip (Palestine).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A Historical Overview: The Israel-Palestine Conflict Since 1948

In scholarly research, our goal was to provide an objective, in-depth historical account of the Israel-Palestine conflict. We aimed to offer readers an unbiased understanding of the conflict's complexity and duration. This historical backdrop, though not our article's focus, forms a strong foundation for comprehending the current situation and humanitarian appeal's urgency.

The Israel-Palestine conflict is deeply rooted in a complex historical narrative surrounding a region with a significant historical and cultural legacy (11). The origins of this enduring conflict can be traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when a series of historical events shaped the landscape that led to the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 (11). Prior to the events of 1948, the territory in question was under British Mandate Palestine, a region that emerged after the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I (11). During this period, Jewish immigration to the area increased, leading to the establishment of Jewish settlements (11). In 1947, the UN passed Resolution 181, known as the UN partition plan for Palestine (11). This resolution

proposed the partitioning of the British Mandate Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with international administration over "Al-Quds" (*ie*; "Jerusalem" in English) (11). This division was based on historical and demographic considerations, as well as the geopolitical context of the time (11). While the Jewish leadership accepted this plan, Arab states and Palestinian Arabs rejected it (11). This divide over the partition laid the foundation for intensified tensions and hostility (11). The year 1948 witnessed the withdrawal of British forces from Palestine and the subsequent declaration of Israel (11). In response to this declaration, neighbouring Arab states, including Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq, initiated military operations against Israel (11). This marked the commencement of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war (*ie*; War of Independence), which led to the significant displacement of Palestinian Arabs (11). The war culminated in an armistice in 1949, leading to the establishment of cease-fire lines and the *de facto* division of territory (11). As a result, Israel emerged as a recognized state, Jordan took control of the West Bank, and Egypt administered the Gaza Strip (Palestine) (11). Understanding this historical context is crucial for comprehending the complexities and challenges inherent in the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict (11). It is important to emphasize that the

historical narrative preceding 1948 encompasses a diversity of perspectives, historical claims, and deep-seated emotions, making it imperative to approach this complex and sensitive issue with an appreciation of the complexities it embodies (11). Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, significant changes in the territorial landscape of the region have occurred (11). The 1948 Arab-Israeli war resulted in Israel's territorial expansion beyond the borders proposed by the UN Partition Plan for Palestine (11). Subsequent conflicts, such as the 1967 six-day war and the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, further altered the status of territories (11). In the aftermath of the six-day war, Israel gained control over several territories, including the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip (Palestine), and the Golan Heights (11). The control of these areas marked a significant expansion of Israeli territory beyond the borders defined in 1948 (11). The status of these territories has remained a contentious issue, with Israel exerting varying degrees of control (11). The situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Palestine) has been particularly complex (11). While Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip (Palestine) in 2005, it faced significant restrictions on movement and access (11). On the other hand, the West Bank remains subject to Israeli military occupation (11). These territorial developments have been central to the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict (11). The expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the status of "Al-Quds", and the question of Palestinian statehood have been points of contention contributing to escalating tensions (11). The situation was marked by sporadic violence and conflicts, including the situation on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, when Hamas initiated an attack on Israel, signifying a significant escalation in the ongoing conflict. The territorial issues and disputes related to land, borders, and settlements continue to be a source of friction, contributing to the ongoing conflict and making a peaceful resolution challenging.

### **Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza Strip (Palestine)**

The situation in Gaza Strip (Palestine) has reached an alarming level of distress, with hospitals and medical facilities overwhelmed and struggling to provide adequate care to the injured (1-3). Persistent violence has placed an immense burden on the healthcare system, making it difficult to address the medical needs of those affected by the conflict (1-3). The collateral damage caused by the hostilities exacerbates an already fragile healthcare infrastructure (1-3). Numerous casualties are feared following the strike on Al Ahli Arab Hospital in northern Gaza Strip (Palestine) on October 17 (5). The

Israeli government had ordered the evacuation of this hospital and 19 others in northern Gaza, a move that the World Health Organization (WHO) had strongly criticized, considering it impossible to execute and a potential death sentence for the patients (5). The situation was described as a massacre, with an explosion causing the ceiling to collapse in the operating room (5). Both the UN and WHO have called for an end to consistent attacks on healthcare facilities in Gaza Strip (Palestine) and urged accountability for those responsible (5). Palestinian authorities have claimed that the attack on Al Ahli Arab Hospital was carried out by Israeli forces, while the Israeli military has attributed it, in an anecdotal manner, to a rocket misfired by Palestinian militants (5). It is noteworthy that later revelations by military specialists confirmed its association with Israeli forces (9). This incident exemplifies the broader issue of subjectivity in media reporting. The Israel-Palestine conflict, laden with historical complexities and differing perspectives, often becomes a focal point for media coverage that may inadvertently introduce subjective elements. In an academic context, it is paramount to emphasize the importance of objectivity, rigorous research, and critical analysis when dissecting events in conflict zones. This commitment to objectivity is essential for fostering a deeper understanding of multifaceted conflicts such as the one witnessed in Gaza Strip (Palestine).

### **Healthcare Workers Under Duress**

We cannot ignore the challenges that the healthcare workers are facing in Gaza Strip (Palestine) since they have been working tirelessly under exceedingly difficult conditions (2, 3, 5). They are facing overwhelming challenges in their efforts to provide medical care to the injured, often with limited resources and infrastructure (2, 3, 5). Gaza Strip (Palestine) health-care system has already collapsed and the UN has sent many urgent messages (12). Gazan hospitals urgently need surgical resources and staff to keep saving the lives of those injured (12). We demand the safety of healthcare workers in their life-saving mission during this conflict. As public health professionals, we call upon the global community to join us in advocating for our colleagues on the frontlines in Gaza Strip (Palestine), amplifying their voices, and ensuring their protection.

### **Impact on Civilians, Especially Children**

The WHO has strongly criticized Israel's recurring directives to evacuate 22 hospitals in the northern Gaza Strip (Palestine), where over 2000 inpatients are receiving treatment, including newborns in incubators

and severely ill patients reliant on life support (13). In a statement released on October 14, 2023, the WHO described this directive as a perilous threat to the lives of the sick and injured (13). The WHO insisted that Israel promptly rescind this order and adhere to international law by safeguarding health facilities, medical personnel, patients, and civilians from being targeted (13). In their response about the attacks on Gaza Strip (Palestine), doctors without borders (DWB) announced “Civilians, civilian infrastructure, and health care facilities must be protected at all times” (14). The civilian population, including a significant number of children, are suffering the most in this crisis (15). The World Movement for the Defense of Palestinian Children declared that the forces of the Israeli occupier have killed more than 1700 children due to their continuous aggression against the Gaza Strip (Palestine) since the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, an average of 120 children per day (15). On October 25, 2023, the UN children’s agency reporting that 2360 children have been killed in less than three weeks (16). Innocent lives are being lost and forever altered by the violence, causing both immediate and long-term physical (*eg*; injuries, malnutrition, infectious diseases, disabilities, and chronic health issues) and psychological trauma (*eg*; post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and fear, depression, grief and loss, behavioral problems, emotional disorders, attachment issues, and desensitization to violence) (2, 3, 5). The lack of access to vaccination and proper healthcare in war-affected regions can have serious consequences for children such as increased vulnerability to preventable diseases, epidemic outbreaks, high child mortality rates, and weakened immune systems. We call for the protection of all civilians, especially the most vulnerable, and for immediate access to humanitarian aid to alleviate their suffering. WHO has underscored four key areas that play a significant role in mitigating the adverse effects of conflicts on civilian lives in these situations: *i*) Facilitating the national adoption of international health regulations, *ii*) Putting an end to assaults on healthcare infrastructure, *iii*) Ensuring the safety of healthcare facilities; and *iv*) Ensuring access to vital healthcare services (17). These last three aspects hold particular significance in the context of the Gaza Strip (Palestine) (3).

### Medical Supply Shortages

Gazan hospitals are facing critical shortages of water, electricity, and essential surgical equipment to treat the injured (18). The majority of these medical facilities have ceased operations due to these shortages, leaving only Al-

Shifa Hospital operational, functioning at over 600% of its intended capacity (1, 18). According to DWBs, hospitals in Gaza Strip (Palestine) are grappling with power outages and dwindling medical supplies (14). It is vital that humanitarian organizations and medical supplies have unrestricted access to Gaza Strip (Palestine) to provide the necessary medical support (2, 3, 5). The shortage of essential medical supplies is exacerbating the suffering of those in need (2, 3, 5). It is crucial to ensure that medical aid reaches Gaza Strip (Palestine) without delay to prevent further loss of life (3).

### A Call for Ceasefire

DWB has appealed for an immediate halt to what they term “unselective violence and collective retribution,” as the conflict between Israel and Gaza Strip (Palestine) persists (14). As healthcare professionals, our primary concern is the well-being and health of all individuals affected by this crisis (2, 3, 5). We call for an immediate ceasefire, which will allow humanitarian organizations to provide aid, facilitate medical evacuations, and rebuild the healthcare infrastructure in Gaza Strip (Palestine). Only through dialogue, negotiation, and a commitment to peace can we hope to end the suffering and loss of life. Table 2 summarizes the public health professionals’ concerns and call to action advanced by the American University of Beirut (Lebanon) (19).

### CONCLUSION

An immediate and urgent response is required in light of the catastrophic humanitarian crisis brought on by Israel’s continued attacks in Gaza Strip (Palestine). In this scholarly investigation, medical experts and supporters of global health come together to make a sincere appeal to all parties involved in ending the ongoing violence to protect civilian lives, the security of medical personnel, and the free flow of humanitarian aid. The seriousness of the situation emphasizes the necessity for collective efforts to mitigate suffering and promote fair and durable peace in the area. The desperate situation facing the people of Gaza Strip (Palestine) is a sobering reminder of how urgent a peaceful end is to this protracted conflict. This calls for an objective evaluation of the complex factors at play, transcending historical grievances and political differences. Our shared humanity calls for a compassionate response rooted in a commitment to safeguarding lives and public health amid the harrowing spectre of violence and adversity. It is within the realm of academia and objective discourse that we must harness intellect and research capabilities

to pave the path towards a more stable and peaceful future in this troubled region.

**Table 2.** Public health professionals' concerns and call to action (adapted from the position statement from the faculty of health sciences, American University of Beirut, October 20, 2023) (19)

Concerns and call to action	Details
<b>Key concerns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Our collective voice rises against the indiscriminate Israeli strikes on civilians in Gaza.</li> <li>- We stand united in resolute opposition to the willful obliteration of health facilities and the tragic loss of healthcare professionals and humanitarian aid workers.</li> <li>- We vehemently denounce the malevolent weaponization of food and water, a blatant violation of international humanitarian law.</li> <li>- Equally abhorrent is the unwarranted denial of humanitarian access to affected populations, an action that compounds an already dire situation.</li> </ul>
<b>Call to action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As public health professionals, practitioners, and educators, we emphatically condemn the grievous acts of violence perpetrated against civilians in Gaza Strip (Palestine), as well as the relentless attacks on healthcare infrastructure.</li> <li>- We call upon our colleagues within and beyond academic institutions, as well as governments, international bodies, and civil society, to heed our urgent appeal to:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Elevate the issue of war as a paramount public health concern and demand an immediate ceasefire, coupled with the lifting of the Gaza Strip siege. We acknowledge that a ceasefire, in the absence of a sustainable long-term solution, risks diverting global attention from the underlying historical and contextual realities faced by Palestinians.</li> <li>ii) Take decisive steps to ensure the swift delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to beleaguered civilian populations.</li> <li>iii) Safeguard medical facilities, healthcare personnel, and the wounded, in accordance with international law.</li> <li>iii) Recognize that access to food, water, and electricity is an elemental human right, invulnerable to political manipulation or weaponization, and endeavor to eliminate these detrimental practices during times of armed conflict.</li> <li>v) Allocate critical humanitarian aid resources to restore essential healthcare infrastructure in Gaza Strip and facilitate the secure return of displaced individuals.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>
<b>Global appeal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In our capacity as public health professionals and guided by the principles of justice and self-determination, we fervently beseech the world to heed the voices of our colleagues on the ground in Gaza Strip (Palestine).</li> <li>- Let us unite in solidarity and amplify their urgent calls for assistance and justice.</li> </ul>

## ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Not applicable.

## AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

Not applicable

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

H.B.S: conception and design.

I.D and H.B.S: analysis and interpretation of the data.

I.D and H.B.S: drafting of the paper.

I.D and H.B.S: revising it critically for intellectual content.

All authors gave their final approval to the version that will be published.

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## DECLARATION

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT 3.5 (20, 21).

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