

# Editorial

## A Call for Protection of Medical Workers and Volunteers

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The ongoing wars in various parts of the world continue to shed light on the importance of medical workers and volunteers in areas such as Gaza, Sudan, and Ukraine, while shocking us by their vulnerability to harm and death in these conflicts. The exponential increase of the number of medical workers harmed in the ongoing conflicts is calling us to action. For example, in the past six months of the Gaza war, at least 484 medical workers and volunteers were killed due to military attacks on health care facilities according to an April 3rd report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs<sup>1</sup>.

Hundreds of physicians, nurses, and other medical workers from all over the world have volunteered to serve in what has remained of the hospitals and clinics in Gaza, risking their lives every day and every hour. Although there are several motives behind medical volunteerism in war theaters, including patriotic, religious, and often purely humanistic motives, the volunteers end up serving in life threatening hot zones. Their loved ones in their homelands live in anguish during their absence with the anticipation that they may hear the worst at any moment. Most of us celebrate these volunteers as heroes. They are highly respected in their home countries and internationally. Their reports on the catastrophic healthcare conditions inform us of the dire need to help the innocent civilian victims of the conflicts who are often women and children as well as the elderly and the sick.

Physicians and their allied medical professionals are life savers not only during peacetime, but more importantly during times of devastating wars with massive civilian casualties and extremely limited resources within health facilities. As the numbers from Gaza above show, a disproportionate number of these medical volunteers and workers have been killed or injured.

The medical volunteers and workers deserve better protection during wartime, regardless of their motives to serve, because they truly try to save lives under difficult conditions; altruistically speaking, they represent the best of us; and they epitomize the very essence of what the medical profession is about.

We believe that it is time for general medical journals, such as ours to unequivocally call for the international protection of medical volunteers and workers and denounce attacks on civilian healthcare infrastructure that cause harm to the medical workers and volunteers and call for their absolute cessation.

**References:** 1. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel-Reported Humanitarian Impact | Day 180. Published April 3, 2024. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-180>

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