

# Our choices in the face of genocide: resistance or collaboration<sup>†</sup>

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“Medicine is a social science, and politics is nothing more than medicine on a grand scale.”

*Rudolph Virchow*

On October 7, 2023, Hamas fighters broke out of Gaza and launched an attack into Israel. The final death toll stood at 1,139, including 695 civilians.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, António Guterres, in his address to the Security Council stated, “It is important to also recognize the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum. The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation”.<sup>2</sup> Israel claiming the right to self-defence has waged a brutal war on Gaza. As of May 17, 2024, the Israel-Hamas war has claimed the lives of 34,844 Palestinians, of which 52% were women and children.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>†</sup>The views and opinions expressed in editorials are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Editorial Board, sponsoring societies, sponsors/advertisers, or publisher.

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On January 26, 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial body of the UN has ruled that Israel was committing plausible genocide in Gaza.<sup>4</sup> This was followed by an ICJ order on May 24, 2024 for Israel to halt its ground invasion in Rafah, the most southern part of the strip, which was designated before as a “safe zone” by the Israelis.<sup>5</sup> The top prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on May 20, 2024 sought arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister and Defence Minister, and 3 top Hamas leaders for war crimes and crimes against humanity.<sup>6</sup> The ICC is a body independent of the UN, with jurisdiction over crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression.

The healthcare system in Gaza has been systematically dismantled by the conflict.<sup>7</sup> Only 10 out of 36 hospitals remain somewhat functional.<sup>8</sup> Hospitals, health units, and ambulances have been severely damaged and destroyed by heavy bombardment, resulting in the deaths of numerous healthcare professionals. The right of patients to receive safe treatment has been denied. Many civilians, especially children and women, have suffered, undergoing surgery without anaesthesia or analgesia due to a lack of medication and equipment. Medication supplies into Gaza were restricted by the Israelis.<sup>9</sup> Since the start of the war, 493 healthcare workers have been killed, and another 214 detained.<sup>10</sup> This has worsened the availability of treatment due to a shortage of doctors and nurses.

Editors of leading medical journals have demanded an immediate resolution and an end of the violence in Palestine.<sup>11,12</sup> The editors of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) emphasised in their reply to a call for content moderation in response to 2 JAMA Viewpoint articles on the Gazan conflict that they will continue to publish on the health consequences of war.<sup>13</sup>

There is no doubt that this is a humanitarian disaster and the world must declare that enough is enough, and this must end. As doctors, we have made a solemn commitment to restore health and preserve the sanctity of life, particularly at its most vulnerable stages. In the face of the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, we as healers, drawing on our conscience, must choose on how to respond. The options are resistance or collaboration. Collaboration with oppression manifests in many ways, from indifference to subtle or obvious support. The only ethical stand for doctors is to advocate for a permanent ceasefire, an immediate cessation of ethnic cleansing in Palestine, and the end of the Zionist colonialism that perpetuates a continuous and intermittent cycle of violence. The editors of MyJA contend that, as a professional fraternity, we have a duty to exert our influence on the issue of attacks on hospitals and healthcare workers, and the obstruction of safe anaesthesia care in conflict zones.

Medicine on a grand scale is politics.

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