

Over 8,000 UK health workers denounce government support for Israel's war

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More than 8,000 medical workers in the UK have signed an open letter denouncing the Department of Health and Social Care's "unilateral expression of solidarity" with Israel as "totally unacceptable." The letter went public on October 16.

On October 13, the DHSC had issued a statement declaring, "We are flying the flag of Israel at the Department of Health and Social Care in London. We stand in solidarity with the people of Israel."

The letter notes that this statement was made "despite UN Experts stating that Israel's actions against Palestinians in Gaza violate international humanitarian law which constitute war crimes."

By that time, the Israeli armed forces had already killed over 2,200 people in the enclave, including 724 children, and injured close to 9,000. A week later, there are now over 5,000 dead in Gaza, including over 2,000 children, and more than 15,000 wounded.

The letter is a powerful indictment of the crimes carried out by Israel's far-right government, with a focus on the appalling situation confronting the signatories' fellow health workers in Gaza and their patients.

Referencing the Israeli siege cutting off access to clean water, food and energy, the authors write, "This war crime not only limited the access of essentials for the day to day survival of Palestinians they also made it harder for hospitals to treat victims of the bombing campaign by the Israeli government. According to the UN this has meant that 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza are unable to access essential health services or even clean water, with 5,500 of those women due to give birth in the coming month."

The siege has also restricted the ability of medical professionals in Gaza to provide life saving care. "Intensive care life support for those in critical

condition, incubators for babies, vital delivery services for pregnant women and surgeries for the injured are just a few examples of services that have been impacted."

"In addition," the letter continues, "local sources on the ground in Gaza have confirmed the deaths of 11 doctors, 10 paramedics, 14 nurses, 4 dentists and 2 medical students with these numbers also set to rise.

"Israel has ordered 22 hospitals in Gaza to evacuate an act which the World Health Organisation has called 'a death sentence for the sick and injured'. This has put the lives of 1,000s of patients at risk."

The order to "evacuate" the north of Gaza is also "putting enormous pressure on the hospitals and medical services there. There are only three hospitals in the south, and they have a very limited number of beds and are poorly equipped."

Describing the devastating impact of the pandemic in the UK, the letter criticizes that "the Department of Health and Social Care should be well aware of the impact crisis can have on patient care and outcomes. Despite this they have shown little to no care for the lives and humanity of patients in Gaza."

The letter's signatories demand the DHSC retract its original statement "and take down the Israeli flag from the DHSC building in London in light of international law violations", that the department "recognises [and condemns] the inexcusable war crimes committed by the state of Israel against Palestinian civilians in Gaza", and that "efforts are made to support Palestinian health services through donations, sharing of resources and equipment."

They further "Call upon on the British Medical Association (BMA), the General Medical Council (GMC), the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), all the associated Royal Colleges of England, Wales,

Scotland & Northern Ireland and all relevant healthcare bodies to denounce the stance taken by the Department of Health and Social Care in supporting a state that is clearly committing inhumane war crimes and acts of genocide.”

Among the 8,000 who signed the letter are medical workers from every section of the healthcare service and of every level of experience, from junior doctors to senior consultants. Their words express the widespread sympathy felt for the Palestinians throughout the population, and outrage at the British government’s support for Israeli war crimes and ethnic cleansing.

Fear of this mass sentiment has motivated a vicious campaign of slander and political repression—backed by the media, Conservative and Labour parties—aimed at cowering or outlawing every outburst of popular protest. The health workers’ letter has been no different. A witch-hunting article in the *Daily Mail* published October 17 screamed that the letter had been signed by a “ Hamas-excusing medic ” and others with “ shocking views about the conflict ”.

On October 21, the *Daily Telegraph* went after President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Dr. Camilla Kingdon (not a signatory to the open letter) for commenting on the Ahli Arab Hospital attack in a circular to members: “ One act of barbarity cannot and must not justify a wider descent into barbarism and so the images of sheer panic and raw grief in the aftermath of the Gaza hospital blast are etched on many of our minds. ”

The *Telegraph* cites various vitriolic, right-wing comments from anonymous doctors attacking Kingdon for “ fuel[ling] hatred ” and “ perpetrating further insult, harm and possible direct retribution against Jews ”.

Outside of these diatribes, the open letter has received no coverage in the mainstream media—in keeping with its downplaying of pro-Palestinian protests across the country.

The health workers’ open letter highlights the divide between rank-and-file workers facing down government-sponsored intimidation to demand an end to the slaughter in Gaza, and the trade union bureaucracy doing nothing to stop the British government’s support for the Israeli war machine. The BMA, specifically named in the letter, has not commented. All the union leaderships in Britain have responded to a call by Palestinian trade unions for

international strike action with deathly silence. Speeches given by a few union officials at the pro-Palestine protest in London on Saturday committed them to nothing.

It is this bureaucracy which stands in the way of overwhelming solidarity with the Palestinians moving into direct political and industrial action in their support. The trade unions have lined up behind the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and are now keeping the industrial peace while Israel wages war in Gaza, and the US and other imperialist powers plot a wider war against Lebanon, Syria and Iran.

NHS FightBack, established by the Socialist Equality Party to spearhead a rank-and-file rebellion against the health union leaderships’ betrayal of countless struggles over pay and conditions, fully supports the health workers’ letter. The struggle of the oppressed people of Gaza is the struggle of the entire international working class.

To take forward their demands, health workers must not confine themselves to placing demands on their unions, but immediately begin organising independently of them, forming rank-and-file committees to pass motions and organise solidarity action against Israel’s war in alliance with workers throughout the National Health Service and social care, in other sectors and across the world.



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