

Tens of thousands of Australian healthcare workers sign petitions demanding Gaza ceasefire

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Around the world millions of people are mobilising in mass protests and demonstrations to oppose the Israeli government's illegal military assault on Palestinians in Gaza and the backing of the genocide by all the imperialist powers.

Australian health workers, horrified by the destruction of hospitals and medical facilities and the rising death toll of their colleagues in Gaza, have organised independent protests in Sydney and Melbourne, and initiated online petitions demanding the Albanese Labor government call for a ceasefire.

Last week a petition, titled "Ceasefire Now: Australian Health Care Workers" and signed by over 40,000 health workers, was tabled in the federal parliament.

Launched on November 2 by Dr Safiyyah Abbas and Dr Ella Tracey, who are paediatric registrars, and Dr Kate Ahmad, a neurologist, the petition states: "We cannot stand by silently and allow this to continue—to do so would betray our medical ethical principles. We urge you to demand an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza."

Presented to the parliament by the Greens, it elicited not a single comment from the Labor government.

Another online petition, which was launched by the Australian Healthcare Students Palestine Action Network (AHSPAN), calls on the Labor government "to demand an immediate ceasefire and an end to the illegal Israeli occupation in all Palestinian territories."

The petition declares that the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) must "abide by the fundamentals of the health profession and urgently and publicly support the ongoing movement for Palestinian

liberation, justice and health."

It also states that these bodies, which have a combined membership of over 350,000 doctors and health workers, must "denounce war crimes relating to the decimation of health infrastructure, withholding of health resources, and the killing of health and aid workers."

Most importantly it also calls on the AMA and ANMF to "cease the censorship of health workers and students speaking against genocide and protect health workers and students who speak up against genocide from penalisation."

Both organisations have played a duplicitous role in response to the bloody onslaught in Gaza.

On October 31, the AMA endorsed the World Medical Association's calls that all parties involved in the conflict must "not use health facilities as military quarters or depots, nor to target health personnel facilities and vehicles."

In other words, the AMA gives sustenance to the Israeli government's false claims that Gazan hospitals are being used as military facilities, for which there is not a shred of evidence. Whatever its statements to the contrary, the AMA's promotion of the Israeli propaganda legitimises the bombardment of hospitals.

Likewise, the ANMF's national biennial conference on October 12–13 passed an anodyne resolution that "condemned" the conflict in the Middle East and called for a ceasefire. The union, it said, "remains committed to seeking peace and safety for all peoples and for all nurses and midwives who are trying to care for their communities in the midst of terrible conflicts." The resolution, in other words, evaded any direct denunciation of Israel, the party that is attacking

medical facilities and health workers, and presented the one-sided and genocidal bombardment as a “conflict.”

Israel’s unrelenting assault on Gazan hospitals and other health facilities has killed at least 521 people, including 16 medical workers. Some 137 direct “attacks on health care” in Gaza had been perpetrated by the Israeli military as of November 12. This has not moved the ANMF and AMA leaderships to issue any other statement about these war crimes.

The Health Services Union, which has over 47,000 members in New South Wales, Queensland and the ACT, has not issued a single statement on the Gaza genocide.

Mental health workers have forthrightly challenged their professional association’s response to the Israeli onslaught against Gaza. A petition initiated by Australian Mental Health Professionals has so far been signed by over 4,500. The petition contains an Open Letter describing the Israeli attacks as “collective punishment and in blatant violation of humanitarian and international law.” It opposes an October 12 statement by the Australian Psychologists Society (APS).

The letter says the APS statement “is contradictory to the ethical standards they hold Australian psychologists to and is dismissive of the 75-year-long ethnic cleansing and genocide of the indigenous Palestinians, creating concern and distress amongst psychologists, including APS member psychologists, and the broader communities they support.”

The letter says the APS ignores “the myriad of war crimes committed by Israel which provide context to the current escalation in the region, thereby exhibiting selective bias and condemnation.”

It then accuses the APS of failing to uphold the organisation’s own code of conduct to “prevent our own biases and limits to objectivity from influencing a situation, act with integrity, and treat all people with dignity and respect.”

These online petitions and the active participation of thousands of health professionals in the mass protests in Australia further reveal the vast gulf between the sentiments and professional standards fought for by tens of thousands of health workers across Australia and the institutions purporting to represent them.

The same health sector associations and unions have collaborated with federal and state governments to lift

basic COVID-19 safety measures and enforce decades of brutal spending cuts to public health and essential services.

Appeals to the Albanese Labor government, which through its military and political alliance with the US government continues to oppose any ceasefire and assert that “Israel has the right to defend itself,” will fall on deaf ears. In fact, Australian governments—Liberal-National Coalition and Labor alike—have issued permits for 322 defence exports from Australia to Israel since 2017. The exact character of these exports is shrouded in secrecy.

Medical practitioners and health professionals opposing the mass murder of men, woman and children and the wholesale destruction of health and other vital services in Gaza must organise independently of the organisations that falsely claim to represent them.

The Health Workers Rank-and- File Committee (Australia) supports and encourages all health workers’ initiatives to mobilise against the Gaza genocide. We urge health workers to contact us to discuss taking this forward.



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