

Australian and New Zealand doctors condemn bullying of health workers opposing Gaza genocide

Our reporters
6 February 2024

On January 17, the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee (HWRFC) in Australia passed a resolution condemning the Zionist witch hunting and doxing of doctors and other health workers who have spoken out against the Israeli military's onslaught on the Palestinian population of Gaza.

Medical workers have been falsely accused of anti-semitism and in some cases reported to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and other regulatory bodies. Those targeted include doctors, nurses, psychologists, midwives, optometrists, paramedics, pharmacists and physiotherapists.

The resolution resolved to defend all victimised medical practitioners and called on workers, students and youth in Australia and internationally to send statements denouncing these attacks and defending health workers' rights to publicly oppose Israel's murderous ethnic cleansing operations in Gaza and the West Bank.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has already featured statements from health workers and their organisations. Today it is publishing a letter from a Queensland public hospital doctor and a statement by the Australian and New Zealand Doctors for Palestine (ANZDP). The statement demands that Australian medical authorities and health workers' organisations take immediate action to stop the "online harassment" and "cyberbullying" of medical practitioners who advocate for the human rights of the Palestinian people.

We urge health staff, students and workers to support the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee's campaign by emailing statements of support here.

ANZDFP Statement of Concern—The Silencing of Doctors

The ANZDFP represent a dedicated group of Australasian medical practitioners committed to upholding the human rights of Palestinian civilians in the Occupied Palestinian

Territories. In response to the recent surge in violence exacerbating the longstanding humanitarian crisis and ethnic cleansing in Gaza, ANZDFP has undertaken a commitment to Palestinian advocacy and civic engagement.

We express deep concern over the targeted cyberbullying of doctors engaged in Palestinian advocacy, the majority of whom are ANZDFP members. This malicious targeting takes the form of online harassment by fellow colleagues, employing social media platforms to disseminate non-contextual and misleading commentary. False accusations, such as anti-semitism and support for sexual violence, are propagated alongside incitements to harass. Regrettably, these actions include the unauthorized disclosure of workplace and medical registration details, exacerbating the harm inflicted on the targeted doctors.

ANZDFP strongly condemns this systematic defamation and doxing of doctors, coupled with the "weaponisation" of regulatory complaints. Such tactics aim to instill fear and silence medical practitioners who advocate for the human rights of the Palestinian people.

Additionally, ANZDFP rejects the unwarranted conflation of "anti-semitism" with Palestinian activism. Anti-semitism is abhorrent and counterproductive to the pursuit of Palestinian self-determination. Misuse of the term undermines global anti-racism efforts and impedes progress towards justice.

In light of international proceedings against the state of Israel and the persecution of doctors advocating for Palestinians, we urgently call for the following actions from our professional medical bodies:

- State and national medical associations must unequivocally denounce Israel's violations of international law, including war crimes and human rights abuses recognised as plausible genocidal acts by the International Court of Justice. We urge these associations to subscribe to the principles of global medical bodies, particularly the principle of medical neutrality during armed conflicts.

- Associations should demonstrate non-discriminatory advocacy by extending statements of solidarity and support for Palestinian civilians, internally displaced and under siege, and Palestinian-Australian doctors. This approach aligns with the compassion and humanity displayed towards other persecuted groups, such as Ukrainian-Australian doctors during the Russian-Ukraine war.

- Professional regulatory bodies, including AHPRA and health commissions, must promptly dismiss and condemn vexatious claims that are poorly defined, groundless, and motivated by differences in political opinion rather than legitimate concerns for clinical safety.

- The Australian medical community should safeguard the role of doctors as health advocates, ensuring that censorship in medical forums related to the situation in Gaza does not stifle discourse on the socio-political determinants of health.

- Recognise and address the rise in racism and Islamophobia, especially anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab racism, within the medical community since October 7th, 2023. Support and increased social awareness for Muslim and Palestinian members are crucial to counter isolation, silencing and attacks.

In conclusion, we emphasise the ethical responsibility of doctors for macro-level advocacy and urge the medical community to support its members, especially those of Palestinian ethnicity facing grief, loss and trauma. It calls for acknowledgment of the rise in racism and Islamophobia within the medical and broader community, seeking increased social awareness and support for affected members.

ANZDFP urges careful consideration and timely action on these matters to minimise ongoing suffering among our medical colleagues and foster unity in addressing these critical issues.

Gary Alvernia, Queensland public hospital doctor

I want to register my opposition to the anonymous complaints made to AHPRA against health workers who have spoken out against genocide in Gaza and to the refusal of AHPRA, to date, to alter its practices to prevent such complaints being made.

AHPRA, as the regulatory body of health workers, has a responsibility to protect the public from unethical conduct and practice without compromising the welfare and rights of health workers, or preventing them from carrying out their responsibilities.

It appears that the dozens of complaints made regarding health workers in Australia may stem from various Zionist organisations who object fundamentally to the description of Israel's military campaign in Gaza as "genocide," and equate such descriptions to anti-semitism. This is an objectively dishonest comparison.

I know I speak for much of my own profession when I say that the scenes of destruction and suffering in Gaza have been heartbreaking and appalling. The specific targeting and destruction of hospitals, the apparently targeted murder of health workers and patients in Gaza, is an atrocity. It is without justification and recalls the worst crimes of human history.

The indiscriminate bombardment of civilians, killing at least 25,000, cutting off food, water and electricity, the deliberate targeting of hospitals and other vital infrastructure in Gaza, coupled with public statements made by Israeli officials calling for forcible resettlement and referring to Palestinians as "human animals," all these atrocities and others constitute genocide in fact.

Health workers have both a right and an obligation, as servants of the public's health and wellbeing, to bring to attention such injustices and crimes. They have a fundamental democratic right to speak against what is happening in Gaza. By any legal, valid definition, none of this should be considered anti-semitism.

An AHPRA investigation, even if it ultimately results in no further action, has a well-documented psychological impact upon the affected health worker. The distress caused to those subjected to a complaint, particularly one that may be drawn out for months, and the resultant fear of losing one's livelihood, can lead to suicide.

Under such conditions, health workers may be too intimidated to follow their conscience and not speak freely on matters they believe to be in the public's interest.

AHPRA is not powerless to remedy this matter. As a matter of urgency, it must dismiss complaints made by Zionist organisations claiming anti-semitism without substantiation.

Gary Alvernia
Queensland public hospital doctor



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