

UK resident doctor explains why NHS workers must demand Israel release Gaza's Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya

“Palestinian doctors are one of us”

NHS FightBack
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NHS FightBack is campaigning for the immediate release of Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, the paediatrician and medical director of Gaza's Kamal Adwan Hospital. He has been detained by Israeli forces since 27 December 2024 and held without charge or trial, let alone any evidence, as “an illegal combatant.”

Dr. Abu Safiya was seized by Israeli forces after they bombarded and forcibly evacuated Kamal Adwan Hospital. He had become the public face of opposition to the destruction of Gaza's health care system, speaking publicly to the international media against famine conditions and mass injuries to children.

On July 2 this year, his lawyer, Nasser Odeh, following a visit to Abu Safiya at the Rakefet interrogation centre, reported that his client bore fresh, severe injuries to his head, eyes, ears and neck, and was struggling to breathe. Abu Safiya told him: “This is the last time you'll see me... they brought me here to kill me.”

Over 2,500 healthcare workers in Britain have signed a petition demanding the release of Dr. Abu Safiya and other detained medics. Ninety-five medical workers are currently detained in Israeli prisons, held indefinitely without charge or trial, according to Al Jazeera.

Campaign group “Save Dr. Abu Safiya”, together with the “Words of Justice” site, have reported that over 600,000 emails and tweets demanding his release have been sent from around the world. Healthcare workers have demonstrated in central London, and outside the prime minister's office in Downing Street in defence of Abu Safiya.

The protests defy the Labour government's efforts to silence those who oppose genocide. A recent report commissioned by former Health Secretary Wes Streeting recommends banning NHS staff from wearing or displaying symbols of solidarity with Palestine. The report was produced by a commission headed by Lord Mann, the former Labour MP who played a prominent role in the Labour Party's “left antisemitism” witch-hunt.

NHS Fightback statement distributed a across hospitals, calling on National Health Service (NHS) workers to demand Dr. Abu Safiya's release. The following interview conducted with a resident doctor working in Wales encourages the expansion of this campaign. We have used the alias “Sara” to protect them against victimisation.

NHS FightBack: What does Dr Hussam Abu Safiya's case mean to you personally, and why must healthcare workers urgently demand his release?

Sara: I am acutely aware of the countless horror stories of murders of patients and healthcare workers in Gaza. Dr Abu Safiya is sadly one of many, but in my opinion the clearest example of the naked cruelty of the Zionist regime. He is a paediatrician, a doctor whose entire patient demographic is seen as needing protection, unable to defend or advocate for themselves—and yet, the Zionist state slanders, tortures and holds him illegally without charge.

To me, this reflects their utter depravity: how can you do this to a children's doctor? I see Palestinian doctors as one of us; their patients are no different and I have a duty of care as a doctor which extends to the global community of all workers.

There is nothing inherently different about the torture of a paediatrician from that of others, but it feels more personal due to knowing the nature of his work somewhat more intimately than another worker's.

I think all healthcare workers across the globe, if they truly believe in their duty of care, must recognise this: we do not work as individuals. Ultimately, our duty is to improve and protect the health of all people, no matter where they are.

NHS FightBack: More than 1,700 healthcare workers have been killed in Gaza, and every hospital has been damaged or destroyed. The UN Commission of Inquiry has described this as evidence of “genocidal intent”. What responsibility do healthcare workers in Britain have towards colleagues facing this onslaught?

Sara: Healthcare workers in the UK are connected to healthcare workers across the globe. The contexts we work in may differ, but our duty to justice for our patients and the importance of advocacy remain the same no matter where we are. Therefore, we must advocate for our colleagues working under conditions that we could not even imagine.

For UK healthcare workers, where our government is supporting the genocide in Gaza despite the protests of the people, it is even more important that we seek alignment with other workers and make it increasingly clear that we find the genocide abhorrent and demand an end to it.

It is important to continue to provide aid and promote Palestinian voices. But ultimately, the genocide must be stopped, and this cannot be done by one individual. It will require the cooperation of all workers.

I've read about small-scale examples of workers refusing to ship arms to Israel and think that a general strike would be essential to bring an end to the genocide.

NHS FightBack: Every government is demanding an “end to the peace dividend” to divert billions more into armaments and war. Do you believe the NHS, as the “jewel in the crown of the welfare state,” is a direct target? Andy Burnham has been installed as the new Prime Minister of a government pledged to increase military spending by a projected £298 billion over the next three years. Does defending the NHS require active opposition to the expanding war drive?

Sara: Yes. You can consider it a ‘casualty’ of warmongering if you want to be charitable, but I personally do not consider this to be the case.

Health and social care, especially with the current state of the NHS, will always be an easy target for warmongers. Governments will look for any reason to divert funds to more profitable endeavours.

I believe all healthcare workers need to oppose war. It can be broken down quite simply to this: war harms our ‘patients’ no matter where they are. It has many ripple effects—I can think of many refugees I work with due to the consequences of Western imperialism. Even ‘locally’, austerity to better fund the war machine has harmed the patients I see—diverted funding widens already massive health inequalities.

How can any healthcare worker see the consequences of war and not see it as inherently oppositional to their work?

NHS FightBack: The British Medical Association (BMA) brought in external investigators against its own president, Dr. Mary McCarthy, after she was accused of antisemitism for opposing the genocide. What does this tell you about the existing unions and whether they will defend healthcare workers who speak out?

Sara: I find the McCarthyite situation ridiculous and a clear sign that unions are not truly aligned with workers. I know many doctors with similar views to Dr. McCarthy’s—that this is a genocide, that Israel is an apartheid state that oppresses its

Palestinian population—and it is disgusting to see this conflated with antisemitism.

The BMA has since released a statement reporting that they support a ceasefire and would like respect for international humanitarian law, but this reads as hollow when they investigate someone for arguably calling for the same.

I would like to underscore that the BMA was late to formally address the genocide. It wasn’t until June 2025 that they formally severed ties with the IMA (Israeli Medical Association), despite there having been years of evidence of genocide, and anger from members of the union.

There has been no clear communication with workers, or mobilisation of workers to aid in ending the genocide. I think this clearly shows the role of the unions as upholding the status quo, even if they say they condemn it.

NHS FightBack: Protesting the genocide has been criminalised—from the ban on Palestine Action to proposals to prohibit health workers from wearing symbols of solidarity with Palestine. How important is it that NHS workers, more than one million strong, lead a powerful movement against austerity, war, and attacks on democratic rights?

Sara: As healthcare workers, our duty is the same to all patients across the globe. We are no different to other healthcare workers, no matter where they are. We all operate under the same principles.

As a doctor, I know that my patients put the utmost trust and faith in me. It is important to me that I do not fail them—and this includes utilising my education to advocate for them. To me, speaking up against the Gaza genocide is, frankly, part of the career path I chose.

I cannot stress this enough: I am a doctor at the end of the day, and I cannot pick and choose who my patients are. In my opinion, no healthcare worker can—if we see oppression, inequality or injustice anywhere, we must eliminate it. How else, otherwise, can you build a truly healthy society?

NHS FightBack calls on healthcare workers across Britain to join the campaign for Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya’s immediate release and to oppose the drive to war, austerity and the suppression of democratic rights.



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