World Health Professions Alliance Calls for Urgent Global Action to Protect Health Personnel from Violence and Persecution

Geneva, Switzerland: 17 February 2026 The World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA) warns of a troubling and sustained escalation in violence, intimidation and persecution of health professionals across multiple regions of the world - a pattern that has intensified since the COVID-19 pandemic and now threatens the safety of those providing care in both conflict settings and situations of civil unrest.

Alarming reports from multiple countries document attacks on health personnel, violations of medical neutrality, and the misuse of healthcare facilities whether in situations of armed conflict or during civil protests. Health professionals in Syria, Sudan, Iran, Ukraine and Gaza, among others, face violence, arrest, detention, and harassment simply for treating patients and upholding their ethical obligations. In recent weeks, reports from Iran have underscored the particular risks faced by health workers responding to unrest while attempting to provide impartial care.

In conflict zones and areas of civil unrest, hospitals and clinics have been damaged, raided or militarised, and medical personnel have been targeted inside healthcare premises.

Howard Catton, Chair of WHPA, expressed grave concern over the escalating threats facing health professionals globally:

"Health professionals must never become targets. Their sole mission is to care for the sick and injured, guided by ethical principles and professional standards. Health professionals are being forced into an impossible position where providing ethical care can result in arrest, violence, or worse. When those who provide care are persecuted for doing their jobs, we undermine the very foundations of healthcare systems and deny entire populations access to lifesaving services."

The Alliance emphasizes that health professionals have both the right and the duty to provide care based solely on medical need, without discrimination and without interference from state authorities or armed groups. International humanitarian law and human rights law are unequivocal in protecting the neutrality of medical practice and the inviolability of healthcare facilities. Yet these principles are being systematically violated, with devastating consequences for both health workers and the communities they serve.

The WHPA calls upon all governments and all parties involved in conflict or civil unrest to immediately and unconditionally release health workers detained solely for performing their professional responsibilities, to ensure safe working conditions for health personnel, and to protect medical facilities from violence and misuse.

Show your support by signing the WHPA Open letter calling for the safeguarding of healthcare facilities and personnel in areas of conflict, in accordance with international law

Note for Editors

The World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA) brings together the global organizations representing the world's dentists, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists and physicians and speaks for over 47 million health care professionals in more than 179 countries and territories. The WHPA works to improve global health and the quality of patient care and facilitates collaboration among the health professions and major stakeholders.

www.whpa.org

Press contact

Joannah Caborn Wengler, Manager of the WHPA Secretariat
jcwengler@whpa.org
+41 22 560 8147

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