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## The healthcare community must approach the violence in Israel and Gaza with inclusive compassion

The conflict in Gaza and Israel transcends faith, race, and nationality. As healthcare professionals committed to principles of dignity, compassion, respect for life, and alleviating human suffering, we should be at the forefront of discussions

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The tragic events unfolding in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories are a failure of our collective humanity. We must all condemn the atrocities committed against Israeli and Palestinian civilians and the indiscriminate killing of thousands of people in the strongest terms. Reactions to these events sadly expose our unwillingness and inability as a society to have nuanced and compassionate conversations. As doctors of Muslim and Jewish heritage who have worked together with colleagues in Palestine supported by the Foundation for Family Medicine in Palestine (<https://familymedicinepalestine.org/>), we think that the current crisis transcends divisions of race, culture, and religion, and requires a shared humanitarian response that is currently lacking.

Dehumanising language has been used by both sides to justify indiscriminate violence targeting men, women, children, and older people.<sup>1,2</sup> The brutal invasion of Israel by Hamas militants on 7 October left thousands of people dead and seriously injured, and profoundly rocked the collective psyche of a nation in permanent fear of decimation. The military response of the Israeli government has, in turn, led to injury and death of people in Gaza on a previously unimaginable scale—which many, including United Nations representatives, have attributed to “collective punishment” and genocide<sup>3,4</sup> of the population through the wholesale destruction of schools, hospitals, and United Nations shelters and cutting off essential supplies of food, water, fuel, medicine, and humanitarian aid. International organisations including the United Nations and World Health Organization have warned of the harm caused by these actions, which are contrary to international humanitarian law and conform with recognised stages on the pathway to genocide.<sup>5-7</sup> Tragically, some of the Palestinian medical colleagues with whom we had worked in the past have been killed or injured, and we are deeply concerned about healthcare services being destroyed and overwhelmed, running out of supplies, and restricting healthcare to lifesaving treatment only.<sup>8</sup>

Those who raise their voices on Palestinian rights risk being accused of antisemitism or support for Hamas, a proscribed militant group. But as healthcare professionals, we cannot ignore the plight of Palestinian communities who have endured occupation, oppression, and denial of basic human rights for 75 years. We must be able to speak about this freely, with sensitivity and respect, and without threats of harassment, disciplinary action, or media vilification. Recurrent cycles of violence must end,

and this can only happen through open dialogue and negotiation.

As a Muslim doctor (HJS), my heart aches and words are not enough to express the pain I feel for my Jewish friends and colleagues affected by the violence. I remember the kindness of the Rabbi and congregants when I attended a Sabbath morning service in Israel, warmly welcoming me as a Muslim and going to great lengths to explain Jewish teachings and practices. I remember reading the Torah during service and marvelling at the similarity with my own beliefs. I also remember the brutality of the occupation, seeing Palestinian people being dehumanised daily and having their basic freedoms and rights restricted. I remember working in refugee camps in Lebanon with Palestinian refugees still holding on to the keys of the homes they were evicted from in 1948 with eyes filled with hope but hearts in despair. I first travelled to Palestine with an inspiring group of Jewish general practitioners who were passionate about improving healthcare for Palestinian people, driven by a strong sense of justice.

As an academic GP (PGW) with extensive experience of working with colleagues both in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, I am horrified by the suffering inflicted on both sides by the violence of recent weeks. The physical and psychological trauma that they are experiencing is almost unthinkable, and inevitably brings to my mind the immense loss which my German Jewish family of origin suffered. Tragically, there seems to be little prospect of an early resolution to the conflict and a real threat of escalation in the region and beyond, with all the horrors that would inevitably bring.

The conflict in Gaza transcends faith, race, and nationality, and we need to have the moral courage to rise above divisive identity politics and polarising narratives to recognise our shared human values and hold space for each other. As healthcare professionals committed to principles of dignity, compassion, respect for life, and alleviating human suffering, we should be at the forefront of these discussions and peace efforts.

Competing interests: HJS is the chair of the Muslim Doctors Association and Allied Health Professionals Community Interest Company and chair of the Federation of Ethnic Minority Health and Care Organisations. This piece is written in her personal capacity. PGW is the founder and former chief executive officer of the Foundation for Family Medicine in Palestine <https://familymedicinepalestine.org/>. This piece is written in his personal capacity.

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