Petition calls for boycott of Israeli Medical Association

Critics are calling for the IMA to be suspended from the World Medical Association over its stance on Gaza. Udani Samarasekera reports.

Health organisations are calling for a boycott of the Israeli Medical Association (IMA) over what they say are violations of medical ethics and international humanitarian law in the war in Gaza. The People's Health Movement (PHM), Artsen voor Gaza (Doctors for Gaza), and Health Advisory Council of the Jewish Voice for Peace want the IMA to be suspended from the World Medical Association (WMA) over its failure to speak out against the genocide of Palestinians, the destruction of health-care infrastructure, and the torture and killing of health-care workers in Gaza.

Leslie London, Emeritus Professor of Public Health at the University of Cape Town and a member of PHM South Africa, told *The Lancet* that the IMA has "colluded in the unspeakable treatment of Palestinians during this war. It has never acknowledged the evidence for the deliberate targeting of health facilities and health workers in Gaza, nor the cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions under which Palestinian detainees are held in Israeli prisons and detention centres. Whilst Gazans were being starved and denied access to water and medical supplies, the IMA kept silent". Only when the British Medical Association suspended its ties with the IMA over the Gaza crisis in June, 2025, did the IMA "offer some very weak appeals for medical supplies to be allowed through", says London. Juliette Mattijsen, co-coordinator of the PHM Europe and a doctor in the Netherlands, says the IMA is "not upholding its medical oath; namely, to stand up for health roles and for colleagues being murdered and detained".

The IMA told *The Lancet*: "The accusations against the IMA are, at worst, lies, and at best, highly contested allegations presented as fact. More egregiously, the signatories calls to expel the IMA from the WMA seem to confuse a country's government with its medical association, an extremely dangerous precedent. Finally, the petition ignores any role of Hamas in the destruction of Gaza's health-care system, such as their deliberate strategy of hiding beneath and within hospitals and using hospitals for military command centers and ammunition storage, in violation of Article 19 of the Fourth Geneva Convention." The IMA adds that it and "its members have made it clear on numerous occasions that they uphold universal medical ethics".

The IMA has issued statements calling for respect for medical neutrality and international humanitarian law, the safe delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza, and humane treatment of prisoners and detainees in hospitals. In August, it expressed "deep concern" over an attack on Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis. *The Lancet* has not identified any statements in which it publicly condemned Israeli attacks on Gaza's health system, criticised Israeli conduct in the war, called for a ceasefire, or responded to UN reports of genocide against Palestinians.

The PHM campaign wants the IMA's suspension to be put on the agenda of the WMA General Assembly in October. Its petition has more than 1150 signatories from health professionals and organisations. The IMA says its expulsion from the WMA "would not promote peace, health care or human rights. Instead, it would damage scientific collaboration, weaken international medical dialogue and establish a precedent whereby political pressure campaigns may be used to isolate health-care professionals on the basis of nationality". The WMA told *The Lancet*: "The WMA deeply values inclusion and believes engagement with its 117 constituent national medical association members is vital to advancing health and medical ethics globally. Preserving dialogue and cooperation among physicians internationally is essential in a world fractured by escalating conflicts and humanitarian crises. Our strong WMA statements calling for the protection of health care in conflict zones including Gaza, Lebanon, Ukraine, Sudan, Syria, Iran, and Myanmar are more powerful because we convene our diverse profession to debate and develop our policies."

It continued that "the IMA, one of our founding members and a strong advocate for WMA ethics and policies, has engaged in the development of our statements on Gaza, and has itself approached the Israeli Government with shared concerns from the medical profession on many occasions. The WMA stands against exclusion of any of its members for the actions of their governments—doing so diminishes our ability to call out injustices, and threatens shrinking the dialogue among physicians at this critical time when consensus in support of our medical ethics is so needed".

Derek Summerfield, honorary senior clinical lecturer at King's College London, who signed the PHM petition, said the IMA "have broken every WMA rule in the book". In October, 2025, the South African Medical Association suspended links with the IMA and called for the IMA's suspension from the WMA over "the conduct of the IMA in the context of international medical ethics and humanitarian obligations" in the Gaza crisis.

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