

ASPHER considers war as a “man-made public health problem”

Wars and armed conflicts have devastating consequences for the physical and mental health of all people involved, for the social life within and surrounding the war-affected regions, and for the health of the environment. Wars destroy health infrastructure, undoing years of health advancement, and severely compromise health systems’ capacity to respond to the direct and indirect health consequences of fighting. Millions of people have been internally displaced or forced to flee their countries due to armed conflict. Forced migration creates further physical and mental health problems during transit, in enforced encampment, and due to restricted entitlement to health care in countries hosting refugees.^{1 2 3} The disastrous effects may last for generations to come. In short, war is a man-made public health problem.

In January 2018, following the Turkish government’s announcement of a military operation in Afrin, Syria, The Turkish Medical Association (TMA) issued a public statement, declaring that “war is a man-made public health problem”.⁴ Eleven present and former members of the TMA’s central council were subsequently arrested and released after one week in custody. They were then put on trial, and on 3 May 2019, they were sentenced to 20 months in prison with the charge of “inciting hatred and hostility.” One member was further charged with “terrorist propaganda”, with an additional 19 months in prison for their social media activity.⁵

ASPHER recognizes the unequivocal evidence that war is a man-made public health problem. ASPHER is committed to direct the attention of the public and of policymakers to the irrevocable damage armed conflicts inflict on population health. Consequently, ASPHER stands in solidarity with the convicted TMA members.

References

- 1 Levy B, Sidel V. War and public health. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- 2 Levy B, Sidel V. Documenting the effects of armed conflict on population health. *Annual Review of Public Health* 2016; **37**: 205-218.
- 3 Razum O, Barros H, Otok R, Tulchinsky TH, Lindert J. ASPHER Position Paper on Refugee Health. *Eurohealth* 2016; **22**: 36-8.
- 4 Turkish Medical Association. War is a public health problem!
http://ttb.org.tr/haber_goster.php?Guid=28de85da-00e5-11e8-a05f-429c499923e4 Date: Jan 24, 2018 (accessed May 27, 2018)
- 5 Devi S. Turkish doctors sentenced to jail for statement on war. *Lancet* 2019; **393**: 2024.