



ASPHER Statement on Conflict and War in Israel and Gaza: Ceasefire Now, Protect Civilians, Restore Health, Uphold Humanity

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The Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER) is an independent association representing 130 Schools of Public Health in the WHO European Region, including in Israel and Palestine (www.ASPHER.org). ASPHER continues to stand for the protection of life, health, and human dignity for all people. Today, we express **renewed and urgent concern** about the deepening humanitarian and public health catastrophe in Gaza and Israel.

Our primary responsibility in war, as in peace, is saving lives. Academic public health leaders have moral and professional responsibilities to speak out about conflicts, and to contribute to prevention, limitation, and strategies for resolving conflicts. ASPHER is deeply committed through its members to assist all people and organisations affected by the conflict who are seeking to save lives and restore conditions for security and development of all populations. ASPHER greatly values colleagues in Schools of Public Health in the region. We know that you have sought to work harmoniously together in the interests of health and peace and continue to do so in these hard times within ASPHER.

ASPHER reaffirms its previously stated condemnation of the attacks by Hamas that killed and abducted several hundred civilians in Israel on October 7th, 2023. However, since then there has been indiscriminate and excessive loss of life, destruction of homes, cities and essential infrastructure. The reality in the region is stark and undeniable. The population of Gaza is being subjected to intolerable conditions, including displacement, food insecurity and even famine, major mental health trauma, weaponization of aid and the systematic destruction of essential infrastructure. There has been large-scale displacement of the civilian population to areas with impossible and untenable living conditions, lacking adequate fresh water and sanitation. Humanitarian aid continues to be interrupted and even prevented from entering the territory. Almost all the health facilities in Gaza have been destroyed or severely damaged. According to the latest UN OCHA Humanitarian Situation Update (#290, May 21, 2025), **more than 53,000 people, in particular children**, have been killed, and nearly **2 million civilians displaced**, many

of them multiple times. More than 80% of Gaza is now unsafe or uninhabitable, while vital civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, water, and sanitation systems, have been destroyed or rendered non-functional.

Under such circumstances, it is impossible to sustain public health activities, or to carry out the essential public health functions that protect communities and make life possible. It is impossible to prepare the future, a major mission of schools of public health, and guarantee the continuity of a well-prepared public health workforce. International public health agencies warn that **famine is imminent**, and the **collapse of mental health support services** threatens long-term recovery. Life-saving interventions, including vaccination campaigns and trauma care, can only safely proceed under a **full and sustained ceasefire** that ensures **safe access for health workers and humanitarian agencies**. Education and training which is the core mission of ASPHER is impossible.

We believe there must be rapid, visible diplomatic efforts to engage in meaningful dialogue, and to take practical steps towards peace and security for both sides. We stand also for public health diplomacy. There must be moves towards a UN-brokered, multi-national peace-keeping intervention in the region. Immediate provision of humanitarian assistance and aid by expert Non-Governmental Organisations must be enabled and enhanced. This requires an immediate ceasefire to enable the safe passage of people and goods across borders.

The population of Gaza, particularly her children cannot wait. Massive humanitarian aid in the form of food, water, shelter, medications, vaccines and essential equipment must be allowed and distributed into Gaza immediately.

As academic health professionals, we advocate diversity and respect. We vigorously oppose ALL hate-based violence and methods. As public health professionals, we are committed to the health of populations through health protection, disease prevention and health promotion. We call for an immediate cessation of violence, for serious engagement by relevant parties in dialogue as the only way to eventually solve territorial battles. **Stop the war. Return all hostages. Let peace and rebuilding begin.** Our humanitarian and public health responsibility is for all people in the region. This humanitarian crisis and situation is unacceptable. It goes against everything we stand for and aspire to as public health educators and practitioners.

There is no public health without peace. ASPHER stands ready to support recovery efforts, promote solidarity between regional health institutions, and champion the role of public health in building lasting peace – in the Middle East as well as in other war-torn regions.