



## 30. Assuring medical and health services during the Israeli-Palestinian armed conflict

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### Background

The developing political reality forces us to address extremely difficult moral and ethical issues regarding the provision of medical and health services to the Arab population in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. The defense and security needs of the State of Israel clash with the free granting of these services, amidst conditions of the violent dispute existing between us and the Palestinians.

Specifically now, when we are burying our dead every day, innocent victims of unrestricted terror, it is very difficult to talk about the human rights of the Palestinians. However, the Israeli Medical Association, as a non-political, professional organization, must formulate its position on this sensitive subject. It must publicize this position and act to advance it, while striking the required balance between the opposing needs of the two populations. This urgent need is highlighted following numerous applications to the management of the Israeli Medical Association, from ordinary physicians and human rights organizations in Israel and medical associations abroad, including an application by the World Medical Association.

The management of the Israeli Medical Association set up a special committee for this purpose. The mandate awarded the committee was to meet with the relevant entities and formulate a document that, after its approval by the appropriate institutions in the IMA, would constitute the official position paper of the IMA on this matter.

Members of the committee met with representatives of the International Red Cross, representatives of the "Physicians for Human Rights" organization, and with Maj. Gen. Amos Gilad, the Coordinator for Activities in the Territories. Present at the meeting with Maj. Gen. Gilad, apart from members of his staff, were the Chief Medical Officer and a representative of the Chief Military Prosecutor.

The position paper appearing below reflects the position of members of the committee as formulated at the end of these meetings and after an exhaustive debate among its members.

### Position paper

- The Israeli Medical Association (IMA) is an independent, non-political organization representing all Israeli physicians, Jews and Arabs alike.
- The IMA reasserts its conviction that life is a supreme value, together with its commitment to this value with respect to each and every individual, regardless of differences in race, religion or nationality.



- The IMA remains firmly committed to declarations of the World Medical Association and international agreements of which it is a signatory, including those related to the protection of human life.
- The IMA views the provision of medical and health care services to the civilian population and treatment of the wounded and injured as an integral part of its commitment to the preservation of human life.
- The IMA expresses its satisfaction with the Israeli Defense Forces' acknowledgement, as expressed to us by its official representatives, of its commitment to the continued assurance of these medical and health services, even in a period of armed conflict.
- The IMA calls upon the Israeli Defense Forces, in the context of this commitment and the recent Supreme Court decision, to take all possible action to ensure the continuation of essential medical services in general, and hospital services in particular, including those in areas of fighting. Directives of this nature should be conveyed and implemented down to the individual soldier in the field.
- The IMA unequivocally denounces the employment of terrorism in general, and the use of human bombs, whose sole objective is the indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians and the spread of fear among the general public, in particular.
- The IMA condemns the amoral use of ambulances for purposes of terrorism and sabotage and calls upon all medical entities not to support such use.
- The IMA denounces any unnecessary restriction, obstruction or attempt to interfere with the activities of medical personnel in the course of their professional duties.
- The IMA expresses deep sorrow at the loss of life and suffering caused to both peoples in the course of the present conflict, and is concerned over the spread of the conflict to innocent civilians in large population centers.
- The IMA supports all medical teams engaged in the saving of human life and treating the victims of this conflict, often at risk to their own safety.
- The IMA stresses once again that medical teams are entitled to absolute immunity from harm and the assurance of unrestricted freedom of movement, while they are strictly engaged in the fulfillment of their professional duties.
- The IMA is aware of the need to strike a balance between the assurance of medical and health services and the need for security, and calls upon the military establishment to preserve this balance with the greatest of care.
- The IMA calls upon both sides to halt immediately the armed conflict that results in the spilling of human blood, loss of life and great suffering to all inhabitants of the region, and to bring an end to the conflict in a peaceful manner.