

# SAFEGUARDING HEALTH IN CONFLICT

## PROTECTING HEALTH WORKERS, SERVICES, AND INFRASTRUCTURE



### Who We Are

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition promotes the security of health workers and services threatened by war or civil unrest. We are a group of NGOs, health professional associations, and an academic center. The coalition monitors attacks on and threats to civilian health; strengthens universal norms of respect for the right to health; demands accountability for perpetrators; and empowers providers and civil society groups to be champions for their right to health.

### What We Do

We raise awareness of the problem of attacks on health workers, facilities, transport systems and clients; work with national and global organizations to strengthen the documentation of such attacks and increase accountability for violators; and empower local groups to play a safe, active role in documenting attacks and demanding accountability at national and international levels.

### What We Seek

- Commitments by governments and non-state actors not to attack or obstruct health care services and to respect ethical responsibilities of health workers to provide care to all in need irrespective of the patient's affiliation
- Enhanced visibility and understanding of the nature and extent of attacks on health services and their impact on access to services by people in need
- Systematic documentation and reporting of violations as a foundation for response
- Vigorous domestic and international action to assure accountability for violators
- Practical strategies for the prevention of violence against health workers, facilities, patients, and ambulances
- Repeal of laws that render the provision of impartial care to be a crime

### Join Us

Join us in promoting the rights of *all* people to access health services and in assuring the safety of health workers devoted to the care of those in need during war or civil unrest.

Membership in the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition is open to organizations that share our purpose and commit to actively supporting our objectives.

Please contact us or visit our website.

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# The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition\*

Leonard Rubenstein, Chair

## Steering Committee

IntraHealth International

Center for Public Health and Human Rights  
at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of  
Public Health

Human Rights Watch

International Council of Nurses

Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation

Management Sciences for Health

Physicians for Human Rights

Physicians for Human Rights – Israel

Syrian American Medical Society

## Members

Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan  
Relief and Development (ACBAR)

Alliance of Health Organizations (Afghanistan)

Consortium of Universities for Global Health

Defenders for Medical Impartiality

Doctors for Human Rights (UK)

Doctors of the World USA

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

Friends of the Global Fund Africa

Global Health through Education,  
Training and Service (GHETS)

Insecurity Insight

International Federation of Health and  
Human Rights Organisations

International Health Protection Initiative

International Rehabilitation Council for  
Torture Victims

International Rescue Committee

Karen Human Rights Group

Medact

Medical Aid for Palestinians

North to North Health Partnership (N2N)

Pakistan Medical Association

Save the Children

Surgeons OverSeas (SOS)

University Research Company

World Vision

## Observers

American College of Physicians

International Committee of the Red Cross

World Medical Association



## Why We Care

Health care services and the health workers who provide them are never more desperately needed than when violence convulses a society. But this is also when they're most vulnerable.

Despite firm standards rooted in the Geneva Conventions and human rights law to protect health facilities, health workers and the patients served during war or civil unrest, and to enable health professionals to act consistently with their ethical obligations, attacks on health functions are all too common.

In violent situations, health workers are at risk of assault, arrest and sometimes kidnapping and death just for doing their jobs. Aside from the human toll they take, these attacks compromise the ability to deliver care to populations in great need, impede efforts to reconstruct health systems after conflict, and lead to the flight of health workers whose presence in a time of great social stress is essential.

Because such attacks usually go unreported, it has been challenging to develop strategies to prevent future violence and to stimulate the political will to demand that perpetrators be held accountable.

## The Need for Documentation, Reporting and Accountability

Until recently, the international community has taken few steps to provide guidance to promote compliance with the law, or to assess and report on violations in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

With a body of evidence and a commitment to protection and accountability, the global community can better protect fragile health systems and those on the frontlines. Systematic data collection will be the basis for developing prevention strategies and holding perpetrators accountable.

The UN Security Council and the World Health Assembly have enacted resolutions designed to strengthen mechanisms for documentation, reporting and accountability. Security Council Resolution 1998 adds accountability requirements for attacks on schools and hospitals affecting children in war. In 2012, the World Health Assembly took an unprecedented step to protect the lives of health workers and patients by requiring the World Health Organization to provide global leadership in methods of collecting and disseminating data on attacks on and interference with health in emergencies—a process that is now underway.

We need to see these resolutions implemented and develop additional mechanisms through the UN and at the national level through human rights institutions and ministries of health.



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\*As of May 11, 2015