



Medical
Association for
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(Australia)

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Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Minster for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House, Canberra

11 October 2023

Dear Minister Wong,

RE: ISRAEL – PALESTINE WAR

The Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW) calls on you to take urgent measures to help restore the rule of law to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The Australian Government repeatedly states its commitment to the rule of law. Yet we are distressed to see this commitment being applied selectively in the Middle East. The prospect of a further full-scale war enveloping the Middle East is to be deplored, and it must be prevented by every available peaceful means. Australia has an important role to play in this, by demanding observance of the rule of law from all, including our allies.

MAPW utterly condemns the recent attacks by Hamas on Israeli civilians, which were brutal, illegal and clearly designed to lead to escalation. However we should not equate Hamas with the civilian population in Gaza, who, along with Israelis, are paying the price for Hamas' reprehensible actions.

Nor should we consider the recent actions of Hamas in isolation from the brutality of Israel's crippling military occupation of Palestinian territories which has been allowed to fester for over five decades. Repeated statements about Israel's right to defend itself, with no reference from your government to Palestinians' rights to live in decency, free from military oppression, leave many Australians feeling increasingly despairing at our partisan support - implicit or explicit - for this oppression.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs [reports](#) that from 2008 to September 19 this year, the number of civilian casualties from actors in the armed Israel-Palestine conflict is 33 Israelis and 3,705 Palestinians. Deaths caused by delayed access to medical treatment and other inhumane aspects of the occupation were not included; nor do these figures show all the despair and suffering caused by daily deprivations, poverty and humiliations, correctly labelled by many as apartheid.

AFFILIATE



FOUNDER



On 10 July this year, Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory, [said](#) in a report to the UN Human Rights Council, that, “Israel’s military occupation has morphed the *entire* occupied Palestinian territory into an open-air prison, where Palestinians are constantly confined, surveilled and disciplined”.

The current escalation in bloodshed reflects the fact that peace cannot be built on decades of oppression; it can only be built on justice. MAPW condemns not only the recent attacks, but also the failure – despite concerns expressed by many leaders and governments elsewhere around the world – to address the oppression directed over a long period towards the Palestinian people. We condemn the arming and political support given to the oppressor, including by Australia. In December 2022, Australia voted *against* a [resolution](#) adopted by the UN General Assembly expressing deep concern about Israel’s gross violations of human rights and international law.

You have stated in recent days that, “I think it's always very difficult from over here to make judgements about what security approach other countries take.” And yet Australia makes such judgements all the time, whether in relation to Russia or any other “enemy” nation; outrage is rightly expressed when war crimes are committed. Australia’s partisan approaches to conflict undermine any role we might otherwise play in upholding peace and the rule of law. To assert the rights of only one side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will add fuel to the fire that threatens to engulf the Middle East and beyond.

We urge you to:

- unequivocally condemn Israeli government threats to cut off food and water to Gaza
- unequivocally condemn *all* attacks on civilians and their infrastructure, including Palestinian civilians as well as Israeli
- assert that *all* people - including Palestinians - have a right to defend themselves
- assert that *all* people have a right to live in dignity, free from military oppression
- uphold the rule of law in *all* circumstances.

On a final matter, MAPW strongly condemns the practice of lighting up Parliament House to mark the outbreak of war. Parliament House is not a billboard or a football club, and should not be used to advertise political positions or curry favour with allies. Lighting up Parliament House - a place where many views are represented - in the national colours of one party to war is simplistic, anti-democratic, partisan and hands our sovereignty to another nation. It does not reflect the seriousness with which conflict should be analysed and addressed. War should be mourned; the lights should be turned off.

Yours sincerely

Sue Wareham

President, Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia)