

Irish Healthcare Workers for Palestine: A Collective Re-Imagining of the Professional Association

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Abstract

In the most recent war on Gaza, Israel has systematically attacked the health system and engaged in an unlawful blockade of basic provisions that are required to deliver healthcare. These attacks have been found by an independent commission of inquiry to violate international law and by the International Court of Justice as a case of 'plausible genocide.' The destruction of the healthcare system affects all civilians, although persons with disabilities may be disproportionately affected, including a higher risk of death during searches and attacks on hospitals. Inaction or silence by health professional associations in the face of the documented targeting of the health system and the civilians of Gaza must be read as complicity. In response, many healthcare professionals have mobilized both internationally and nationally in various countries, including in Ireland, where an active solidarity movement called Irish Healthcare Workers for Palestine emerged. This paper documents its birth and is a collective reflection by members of the Irish Healthcare Workers for Palestine about our professional associations. We examine the responses of those representing doctors (General Practitioners [GPs] and Psychiatrists), nurses, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, social workers, and pharmacists. With a partial exception of some associations, we demonstrate a pattern of inaction, delayed, weak, or equivocating statements, and, in some cases, complete silence. The paper concludes by considering the 'inventive nature of solidarities', where we imagine an interdisciplinary association of healthcare workers built on the principles of human rights and justice.

Positionality Statement

We are healthcare professionals and members of Irish Healthcare Workers for Palestine. Although all reside in Ireland, we represent diversity in nationality and ethnicity. We are clear in our position that the right to health is an inalienable and universal human right, indivisible from other human rights. As such, we consider the protected status of healthcare infrastructure and personnel to be incontrovertible.

Israel's destruction of the healthcare system in Gaza

The likely death toll of the current war on Gaza is at 186,000 people or 7-8% of the total population,¹ although only a fraction of these individuals have thus

far been able to be identified, with many bodies still trapped under the rubble (Khatib et al., 2024). The injuries are immense and continuing (OCHA Humanitarian Situation Update | Gaza Strip, 23 September 2024), at a scale that would push even the most robust and well-equipped health system to the brink of collapse. Yet the health system in Gaza has itself been targeted by Israel. According to a United Nations (UN) report, Israel's extensive bombing campaign in Gaza has decimated essential services and unleashed an environmental catastrophe that will have lasting consequences (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 20 September 2024). Through its siege over Gaza, obstruction of humanitarian aid alongside targeted attacks and killing of healthcare workers, Israel is intentionally causing death, starvation and serious injury (UN Thematic Report, 20 September

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¹ These figures are from June 2024 and will be higher by the time of publication.

2024). In the context of healthcare, this siege amounts to the unlawful blockade of basic provisions required to deliver care. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that in all of Gaza, “only 17 out of 36 hospitals remain functional – all partially – and just 57 out of 132 primary health-care facilities are functional” (OCHA Humanitarian Situation Update #221 | Gaza Strip, 23 September 2024). As we write, three hospitals in Northern Gaza (Kamal Adwan, Indonesian, and Al Awda hospitals) are currently under attack by Israel (OCHA Humanitarian Situation Update #231 | Gaza Strip, 22 October 2024). The destruction of the health-care system affects all civilians, although persons with disabilities may be disproportionately affected, including “heightened risks of death during searches and attacks to hospitals” (UN Committee on the rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2024, paragraph 6). The prevalence of disability is increasing, with Gaza now representing the highest number of children with amputations in modern history (Doughten, 2024). More hospitals and healthcare facilities have been targeted and destroyed, and more humanitarian and healthcare workers have been killed than in any other war in the last century (Salzenstein, 2024).

Healthcare workers are being forced to choose between leaving the patients they are treating or to face likely death or detention with possible torture (Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories B’Tselem, 2024; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 31 July 2024). They confront insurmountable personal losses while they continue to act according to the values of our professions. An Independent UN Commission of Inquiry has found that Israel’s attack on healthcare facilities constitutes war crimes and crimes against humanity (United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2024, paragraph 89). These atrocities against civilians, healthcare professionals, and civilian infrastructure are violations or unlawful under International Humanitarian Law and the Fourth Geneva Convention in particular (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 1949), are in contravention of the ethical principles of healthcare (e.g. *Declaration of Geneva*, 2005; *Dual Loyalty and Human Rights in Health Professional Practice: Proposed Guidelines and Institutional Mechanisms*, released by International Dual Loyalty Working Group, 2002), and have been found by the International Court of Justice on the 26 January 2024 to be a case of plausible genocide (International Court of Justice [ICJ], 2024; 31 January 2024)

There is no neutrality possible in the face of humanitarian catastrophe and violations of international law, not unless we also accept the equivalent in our domestic health services - that we are willing to accept impartiality

and silence when our patients, services, or colleagues are under threat or are victims of adverse events. Inaction or silence in the face of the documented atrocities being perpetrated on the health system and people of Gaza must be read as complicity.

In response, healthcare professionals are mobilizing in various groups under the auspices of networks such as Healthcare Workers for Palestine, both internationally and nationally, in various countries, including Ireland. They are actively questioning public representatives and their professional associations and advocating at the governmental level, demanding that the protection afforded to healthcare professionals and infrastructure under International Law is respected. This paper is a collective reflection on the statements, the inaction, and, in some cases, the silence of our professional associations in Ireland, our experience of a healthcare workers’ solidarity movement, and the questions it raises for how we wish our identity and values to be represented.

Irish Healthcare workers for Palestine: The birth of an interdisciplinary solidarity movement

Irish Healthcare Workers for Palestine (IHCW4P) is an active interprofessional network of healthcare professionals that has organically grown in membership since beginning on 14th November 2023. The group came into being when healthcare workers in Ireland, alongside many other citizens, began witnessing in real time and detail the ceaseless killing of children and civilians in Gaza via social media and other outlets. Members also witnessed first-hand the distress of our Palestinian diaspora colleagues, people that we work alongside every day, whose families and homeland were being destroyed in the escalation of violence from October 2023. This personal contact brought home to us the horrendous conditions that Palestinian people have been living under since 1948 and drew us away from the psychic numbing that can occur when we hear of large-scale tragedies far away. Instead, we were made acutely aware of the individual stories about people who were real to us; people living in conditions that are mirrored by our own history of occupation, deepening our sense of solidarity with them. For some members, the contrast between the rhetoric during the invasion of Ukraine and the contrasting reticence to speak on Gaza was a factor in organizing. In reflecting as co-authors, it seems that there were perhaps multiple factors coalescing at this specific point in time and within our sociohistorical and political context. In response to this early sense of a need to organize, we reached out to other healthcare groups with a holistic global perspective, including Irish Doctors for the Environment, and very quickly, the group grew to over 300 Irish healthcare workers from a wide range of disciplines.

Now at 392 active participants,² IHCW4P has become a responsive dynamic network with a clear aim of solidarity. There is no official 'membership process', and the group largely organizes via WhatsApp and self-monitors for appropriateness. The number of active members represents a fraction of all healthcare workers. The reasons for this are not completely clear as the group receives a lot of support from the wider healthcare community at vigils outside conferences, for example. Fear of being accused of being 'political' or antisemitic might be driving some of the reluctance, as is, we argue later, a fundamental misunderstanding of healthcare worker neutrality. Some comments we have heard from other healthcare workers include fears it may create difficulties within their employment and the perception of causing divisions at work. Other healthcare members may have long-standing engagement with other solidarity groups and place their energy in groups such as the Irish Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, Mothers Against Genocide, and other local Palestine solidarity groups. The group held the first vigil outside University Hospital Galway on January 23rd, 2024, and this is now a regular Tuesday fixture. Vigils outside other hospitals and in public spaces have followed, alongside protests outside the US embassy, Israeli embassy, the Dáil (Irish Parliament), and block participation in the national demonstrations organized by the Irish Palestinian Solidarity Campaign. In some vigils, we gather together to read aloud the names of our healthcare colleagues who have been killed or unlawfully detained by Israel since 7th October 2023. These are times of collective sorrow, which extend further as the list of names grows devastatingly long. Letters, sometimes garnering over 1,000 healthcare workers' signatures, have been delivered to the Department of the Taoiseach, and discipline-specific campaigns have called on our respective professional associations to publicly vocalize and lobby the government. The interdisciplinary nature of participation has been a core value of the group, with the hope that the moral and ethical authority of healthcare professionals might influence change.

In the Irish context, there are very tangible possibilities for influence. There also exists a strong history of transnational solidarity and activism (Smith et al., 2024). Ireland sees echoes of its own history in Palestine - a brutal history of settler-colonialism in which the broad aim is one of mass eradication and forced expulsion through occupation (Browne, 2024; see Wolfe, 2006 for a discussion of settler-colonialism and genocide). Enforced starvation may be an act within this settler-colonial project and is 'a supreme act of colonial violence' - an experience shared between the current situation in Gaza and that of *An Gorta Mor* ('The Great Hunger' or the Irish famine) (Browne, 2024, p. 76). Based on those echoed experiences alone, there is solidarity with Palestine. The public discourse and the political rhetoric, if not action, in Ire-

land is decidedly sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. We live and work in a context where speaking up for Palestinian colleagues working in the most dangerous place in the world to be a healthcare professional - Gaza - is generally safe. The risk of speaking out against the destruction of healthcare is minimal, both for individuals and for the professional associations who, until recently, we considered as representing our identity and values. Some demands, such as a boycott of suppliers of healthcare products and medications (e.g. Teva, as listed on the official Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) list), would be feasible in our relatively small country with a public health system. Demands to stop the transit of weapon-carrying flights through Shannon airport are directed at achieving a concrete step to protect healthcare facilities, healthcare workers, and civilians in general. Enactment of the 'Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill' (2018) is another demand with a tangible outcome if successful. This bill would ban and criminalize trade with and economic support for settlements in occupied territories deemed illegal under international law. These levers in the Irish context underscore the tangible imperative for healthcare professionals, and their respective bodies, in Ireland to act. It is in this context that we turn to the disturbing inaction and/or silence of our professional associations.

Professional associations and the abdication of collective responsibility

The focus of this paper is on healthcare professional associations. We acknowledge, however, that health professions researchers, health education institutions, including universities, and global health scholars can also be subjected to critique on their weak or non-existent response in relation to Palestine. The silence of the health professions apparatus is pervasive and far pre-dates the current Israeli attacks on Gaza (Gilbert, 2018). The decision to focus on healthcare professional associations reflects the origins of this paper, stemming from a solidarity movement that sought more collective action than what was visible from their representative bodies. While we acknowledge that this silence is a global problem, we focus our analysis and argument on the healthcare professional associations in Ireland, addressing our immediate sphere of influence and in alignment with the solidarity aims of Irish Healthcare Workers for Palestine. The remainder of this paper questions whether healthcare professional associations in Ireland remain relevant in the context of their relative inaction and, in some cases, complete silence on Gaza or whether we can imagine an alternative that better reflects our shared values.

In current practice, membership of a discipline-specific professional association is a norm in healthcare. Professional associations, for the purpose of this paper, are

² As of 1st December 2024.

defined as organizations with voluntary membership in which a specific disciplinary qualification is required of members who typically pay a fee to access the resources on offer. Such resources include networking with peers, access to knowledge through conferences and publications, and opportunities to co-produce products of knowledge translation, such as clinical guidelines and recommendations (Hager, 2014; Rusaw, 1995; Walston & Khaliq, 2012). Membership of a professional association may also provide reputational value, with certification demonstrating competence to the public (Walston & Khaliq, 2012). This reputational value has, in some professions and countries, been superseded by mandatory professional registration requirements with a statutory accrediting body. Where mandatory registration with a public body exists, the relevance of professional associations must then lie in their offerings of resources and representation of members' identities and values.

Some argue that professional associations are an essential component of professionalism' (Friedman & Phillips, 2004, p. 187) in that they provide a context in which professional identity is demonstrated and maintained. It is this aspect of *identity and values* that has been brought into sharp focus by the lack of meaningful engagement of professional associations on the destruction of healthcare services in Gaza. Indeed, many healthcare professionals have felt compelled to distinguish our own identity and values from the inaction and/or silent complicity displayed by the professional associations that purport to represent us. We have been left questioning how our fundamental values seem so mismatched with the lack of moral and ethical clarity shown by our representative bodies, despite multiple attempts at engagement and offers to co-produce statements and collaborate on solidarity actions. The social media campaign of 'not in my name' (IHCW4P, 2024) demonstrates how healthcare workers in Ireland feel compelled to separate their own identity from the acquiescence and complicity of institutions of power.

The desire of professionals to "[build] a profession that he or she cares about" and "the opportunity to improve society" are collective motivations for membership of professional associations (Gazley & Dignam, 2010, p. 5). Such motivations demonstrate the expectations of professionals that the association will collectively lobby on behalf of the interests and values of the profession *and* the needs of those who are served (Barbieri & Mattozzi, 2009; Knoke, 1988). Yet there is evidence to suggest that professional associations may, in fact, abdicate collective action, even that related to core values, in favor of advocacy by individual members (see Welchman & Griener, 2005). Such abdication, seldom discussed, may be more prominent when the issue at hand is considered 'political', controversial, or less deserving of attention. Instead, lobbying and advocacy is directed towards generic, abstracted future changes such as increased healthcare budgets or restructuring of services. These goals are worthwhile, but they should not mean avoidance of collective action by professional associations on

immediate and tangible harms. For example, Welchman and Griener (2005) present a case of the avoidable suffering and premature death of 45-year-old Michael Joseph LeBlanc in a prison hospital. The authors demonstrate how the professional association for nursing, through limiting their scope, both explicitly and implicitly, to advocacy *for nurses*, shift patient care advocacy to the individual nurse, rather than opening the possibility of collective responsibility. We see parallels in how professional associations respond to calls for lobbying and advocacy on behalf of colleagues in Gaza – responses which 'welcome' individual members to speak out, but wholly abdicate any action as a collective responsibility.

Many, but not all, of the healthcare professional associations in Ireland have made statements on Gaza (see Appendix 1 for a tabulated account of selected statements and silences). Here, we catalogue the responses of selected professional associations in Ireland, which differ in the force of the language used and range from early engagement to continued silence. This paper focuses exclusively on a subset of associations in Ireland. Still, we encourage the reader to compare these statements across healthcare disciplines within Ireland, and the wider context of statements, or silences, from other professional associations internationally.

Of the healthcare professional associations considered in this paper, the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) were the first in Ireland to make a public statement, on the 13th of October 2023 (INMO, 2023). INMO remains the association that has most consistently addressed the ongoing attacks on healthcare in Gaza, with public statements and numerous supportive social media posts. Their most recent statement was on 30th October 2024, in which they explicitly name 'the Israeli Defense Forces' as the perpetrators of the attacks on healthcare. The INMO welcomed the Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland to its Annual General Conference in May 2024. INMO is part of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, with members partaking in the national demonstration carrying an INMO banner. The INMO has also moved beyond statements of concern and is involved with the Gaza Paediatric Care Initiative, working to ensure that 30 young children from Gaza will receive life-changing care in the Irish health service. The INMO has been consistent and open in its message and actions of support for Palestinian healthcare workers and supports relevant action on the issues.

The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) also issued a relatively early statement on 18th October 2023 and has issued two subsequent statements to date (2023; January 2024; May 2024. see Appendix 1). Both statements condemn violence against civilians and call for the protection of civilians, with a clear emphasis on the profession's commitment to human rights. The second statement explicitly outlines and condemns the murder and destruction seen in Gaza - using the phrase of a 'genocide in the making' with reference to statements by UN officials and Irish President Michael D. Higgins to support this stance. This statement and stance were wel-

comed by many members of the IASW. In May 2024, the IASW endorsed a statement written by an informal international group of social workers, which called on social workers, educators, students, and organizations to continue to speak up against genocide and oppression against Palestinian people and to hold our organizations accountable for their silence (IASW 2024). The IASW hosted its annual conference in October 2024, with a central theme on human rights - *a welcomed moment of silence was held at the outset, although there was an absence of discussion on one most significant human rights violations of our time.*

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland (CPsychI) issued two statements, the first on 13 November 2023, expressing deep concern for all those tragically affected by violent attacks in Israel and Palestine and the humanitarian crisis that was escalating in Gaza. The statement expresses shock and sadness at the incomprehensible nature of deaths in the region and compassion for those suffering loss. The statement calls for international humanitarian law to be respected and to protect vulnerable groups, including children, people with intellectual disabilities, and the ill. It expresses solidarity with psychiatry and medical colleagues endeavouring to provide assistance and support under extremely difficult circumstances. The College also highlights the need to stand in solidarity with our colleagues in Ireland from the region. The College statement ends with the following quote 'for evil to thrive, good needs to do nothing,' a quote routinely attributed to Edmund Burke. A second statement was issued in February 2024 (CPsychI, 2024) reiterating the concern and distress caused by the accelerating violence in the Middle East, the loss of lives, and the intensification of horrific effects on innocent civilians, in particular the irreparable injury to children and the vulnerable, acknowledging the long term consequences and the impact on medical and health care. The College statement calls for a peaceful and non-violent solution for all. *Neither statement explicitly called for a ceasefire, access to humanitarian aid, or protection of health care.*

The Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists (ISCP) has, to our knowledge, made three statements, although only the most recent, released in late May 2024, is visible on their website (ISCP, 2024; see Appendix 1 for the currently available statement). Unlike the first, their current statement includes the word 'ceasefire', and states support for the World Health Professions Alliance statement on the conflict in Israel and Gaza, which was released on October 13th, 2023. The ISCP was also asked in April 2024 whether (by virtue of being a member of World Physiotherapy) it is appropriate to be associated with qualifications awarded from Ariel University, built in an illegal Israeli settlement in the occupied territory of the West

Bank (See Wind, 2024 for a discussion of the role of Israeli Universities in the suppression of Palestinian rights). At the time of writing, no response from the ISCP has been received. In general, the ISCP has been open to dialogue; however, as would be predicted from the analysis by Welchman and Griener (2005), *it has relied on committed members to engage, transferring the responsibility for advocacy away from the collective and to the individual.*

The Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP) issued a statement calling for the protection of healthcare and urging both sides to seek a peaceful solution but *refused requests from members to call for a ceasefire* (ICGP, 2024). The College also refused a request from members to hold a session at its annual conference in Sept 2024 on 'Supporting Healthcare in Gaza' to include the voices of Palestinian-Irish GPs. It did hold a session on Healthcare in Conflict Zones, during which there was a discussion of Gaza, and the response of the audience made clear that this was a much-valued session. The WONCA (World Association of GPs) Europe Conference 2024, hosted by the ICGP, was actively boycotted by a number of ICGP members (and other delegates) because of the apartheid militaristic stance towards Gaza evidenced on its website by the President and a vigil for murdered and detained healthcare workers was held outside. The ICGP did not allow reporting of this boycott and action in the coverage of the conference in the monthly ICGP magazine Forum, despite it being the first public academic boycott in the College's history. The issue in question did, however, include an article, 'Protecting healthcare workers and patients in times of conflict,' which provided a very thoughtful analysis of international law and how States may justify or deny breaches. The ICGP has therefore made welcome statements and provided valuable educational opportunities for its members but has stopped short of calling for a ceasefire or naming a genocide, citing the apolitical nature of the College, and the need for balance, the desire for an ordered world perhaps outweighing all else.

There are two professional associations for pharmacists in Ireland, the Hospital Pharmacists Association of Ireland (HPAI) and the Irish Pharmacy Union, representing community pharmacists.³ *The HPAI has not released a statement of its own* and sits within the FORSA trade union. FORSA released a statement on the 12th of October, 2023, but did not specifically refer to healthcare workers or the targeted destruction of the healthcare system in Gaza (Callinan, 2023). The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) released its statement on the 17th of October 2023 (FIP, 2023) where it condemned all attacks on healthcare workers and stated that pharmacists have an ethical duty and responsibility to provide aid to others in a disaster situation. The FIP also has a

³ The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) as the statutory and regulatory body for pharmacists and pharmacies in Ireland and, as a regulator is beyond the primary scope of this paper.

Statement of Policy on the role of the pharmacist in the management of disasters including conflict (FIP, 2017) which includes advocacy and capacity building initiatives. The only Irish organisational members of the FIP are the Irish Pharmacy Union which represents Community Pharmacists, along with two academic institutions – Trinity College Dublin, and the Royal College of Surgeons. None of these members have released a statement calling for healthcare workers to be protected in Gaza. In contrast, other organisational members of FIP outside of Ireland have released subsequent statements including the Royal Pharmaceutical Society in the UK (RPS, 2023). These organisations outside of Ireland stated that there should be unrestricted access to medical supplies so that both the lives of healthcare workers who dedicate themselves to saving lives and civilians who are in need are safeguarded.

As of October 2024, the Association of Occupational Therapists in Ireland (AOTI) has not released a statement calling for a ceasefire, access to humanitarian aid, or the protection of healthcare workers, nor have they indicated that they plan to do so. In total, five letters have been written to AOTI, appealing to them to make a statement and listen to a large group of their members. The formation of the grassroots group 'Irish Occupational Therapists for Palestine' highlights a demand within the Occupational Therapy community in Ireland to address occupational injustice and raise awareness about the situation in Gaza. Irish Occupational Therapists for Palestine actively collaborates with international counterparts, connecting with OT professionals and associations in multiple countries, including Palestine, to reinforce a global stance on occupational justice (e.g., see The ANONYMOT Collective, 2024). They are calling on professional bodies to address what they term occupational apartheid—the systemic deprivation of occupational rights and resources in Gaza. This group emerged from Irish Healthcare Workers for Palestine, initially driven by two committed occupational therapists who were members, aiming to prompt the Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland (AOTI) to take a firm stance on the genocide in Gaza and to be a voice for Occupational Therapists in Ireland. In July 2024, the group had a campaign asking as many AOTI members to email the association individually to highlight their disappointment in the lack of leadership and action. This resulted in the AOTI Board meeting with members of the discipline-specific solidarity group, Irish OTs for Palestine, to listen to their concerns. Despite their persistent efforts, AOTI has maintained a stance of aligning with the World Federation of Occupational Therapists' statement, issued in November 2023 with no update since, which the group argues lacks specificity and urgency in addressing the on-the-ground healthcare challenges in Gaza. The ongoing silence from AOTI has only strengthened Irish Occupational Therapists for Palestine's resolve to continue their advocacy, emphasizing the essential role of OTs in supporting and promoting occupational justice on both local and global fronts. Many current members of AOTI have not renewed their

membership, and many have requested that their automatic membership of the World Federation of Occupational Therapy (WFOT) be cancelled due to their lack of statement and not calling for a ceasefire. Some AOTI members who work in private practice settings and rely on professional insurance accessed through AOTI are actively exploring other insurance options in order to free them to revoke membership in the association.

The Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists (IASLT) has also remained silent to date and refused to engage meaningfully with members on the issue. They have indicated that their concerns remain limited to the Irish context despite their 2023-2025 strategic plan, stating that 'IASLT will continue to advocate internationally for those with speech, language, communication, and swallowing needs' (IASLT, 2023, p. 7). Given the enormous impact of the war on Gaza on persons with communication disabilities (see The Language and Human Rights Collective, this issue), the strategic plan statement would surely demand a statement of solidarity at minimum. In a similar pattern to the other professional associations, they encourage individual members to inform themselves about wider issues, thus abdicating collective responsibility. At least two IASLT members have revoked their membership in response, while others feel trapped in membership by the access to professional insurance via the association and are exploring alternative routes to insurance, a situation similar to that within Occupational Therapy.

Cataloging the responses of these nine professional associations in Ireland reveals a range of statements that vary in strength, up to and including complete silence. These statements can be contrasted with an example of a strong statement from the New Zealand College of Midwives (2024) that makes reference to the ICJ ruling of plausible genocide, explicitly and consistently names Israel as the perpetrator of 'systematic destruction' and 'annihilat[ion]' of infrastructure. In addition, that statement goes as far as to reference the ICJ advisory opinion on Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories as illegal. They identify a failure of global governance and demand that their government act in accordance with its international obligations. The statement of the New Zealand College of Midwives comes closest to what most members of IHCW4P consider to be a comprehensive statement in keeping with the principles of healthcare.

The reasons for the different strengths of statements are unclear but may relate to the degree to which political conscientizing or a social justice foundation forms part of the profession's culture. In applying Miller's (2002) approach to Political Consciousness to the speech and language therapy, Kathard and Pillay (2013, p. 85) suggest that a politically conscientized profession must be 'critical of and act on social, cultural, political, economic, and even personal forces, systems, and structures which create and perpetuate inequality'. Some professions, such as social work and nursing, have social justice values as core to the professional culture, thus making 'speaking out' consistent with the identity of the profes-

sion. The general pattern of inaction, delayed, weak or equivocating statements and, in some cases, complete silence by healthcare professional associations in Ireland (and beyond) is a neutral posturing consistent with the phenomenon of Palestinian exceptionalism, that is, a situation in which “when the topic turns to Palestine, the same people who consistently advocate for freedom and justice fail to live up to their professed ideals” (Lamont Hill & Plitnick, 2021, p. 11). Not only has the ‘neutral posture’ in relation to Palestine been normalized, but the silence also demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of healthcare worker neutrality and impartiality in the face of humanitarian disaster. It is a dangerous example of undermining the ethical imperative that compels healthcare professionals to take a stand against conditions that put patients and healthcare providers at risk.

Statements are welcome and to be commended in the context of the general silence of professional associations across the world. However, even the strongest statements arguably have not gone far enough. Statements alone, without supporting members to organize in collective action, fall short of the ethical imperatives of healthcare professionals and, by extension, their representative organizations. While some professional associations have agreed to their logo to being used in marches, others have refused permission despite multiple requests. None have used the tangible levers in the Irish context as opportunities for collective action; that is, they have taken no steps in relation to supporting or encouraging members to engage or push for boycott, placed no political pressure on the government in relation to the Occupied Territories Bill, nor taken a stand on the transit of weapons through Ireland’s Shannon Airport. Abstracted statements are as far as most associations seem willing to go.

As a result of the inaction and/or silence of our professional associations, individual healthcare workers in Ireland who feel compelled to act on behalf of their colleagues in Gaza have been left to lobby via unofficial networks and organize accordingly. Membership of Irish Healthcare Workers for Palestine (and other solidarity movements) is increasing as individuals recognize the importance of professional integrity and accountability.

Transformative solidarity and re-imagining the professional association

Solidarity, as we interpret it, requires collective engagement and an alignment between words and action, encompassing what Featherstone (2012, p. 7) calls ‘a transformative relation’. The transformative power of solidarity recognises that it is “not just part of the binding together of pre-existing communities” but is generative

and transformative, “shaped through diverse exchanges, contacts and linkages” (*ibid*). Irish Healthcare Workers for Palestine are a diverse group, in socio-cultural backgrounds and in professional practice, but the solidarity is explicitly understood as extending beyond our group, with the very purpose being in solidarity with our Palestinian colleagues. We act together within the Irish context in order to influence meaningful change in the midst of this assault on healthcare and humanitarian catastrophe.

In our solidarity, we have discovered a *collective* and *active* commitment to the principles of universal human rights, to healthcare in all contexts as a protected entity, and to justice. We are clear in our position that the right to health is an inalienable and universal human right, indivisible from other human rights. As such, we consider the protected status of healthcare infrastructure and personnel to be incontrovertible everywhere and at all times. Many of us have started to question whether we have more in common with each other across our disciplinary boundaries than we do with our discipline-specific professional associations. If most existing professional associations are unable to act on demand for the protection of healthcare workers and facilities as a universal value and public good, then we question whether such associations represent the values held by the majority of healthcare professionals. While this is not a call to abandon the distinct specialties of healthcare professions, it is a call to reconsider whether many of our professional associations, as currently formed, are (wholly) fit for purpose; a call to re-imagine a justice- and rights-based association of healthcare professionals. We are discovering that ‘solidarities are inventive’ and can ‘produce new ways of configuring political⁴ relations and spaces’ (Featherstone, 2012, p. 7). We are beginning to imagine, express and embody an interdisciplinary association of healthcare workers built on the principles of solidarity, human rights, and justice.

Dr Khawla Badwan (2024), a scholar of language, education, and social justice, recently articulated the collective disappointment in our existing institutions but also alluded to the hope that exists when we find voices of solidarity:

‘We have been let down by so many. More than we can ever mention or tag. Yet, there have been always some voices with moral clarity, integrity and courage. Voices that bring values to life - hand in hand with scholarship and practice.’

Our healthcare colleagues in Gaza are the best of us, the clearest voices of moral clarity, integrity, and enormous courage. They bring the true values of healthcare to life and compel us to imagine better, do better, and act together for equal respect, dignity, and human rights for all.

⁴ ‘Political’ in this context should not be interpreted to mean political parties or specific political alignment, but is used in the sense of power relations and decision-making of groups.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the content of this article.

Signatories

(Signatories did not participate in the writing of this commentary. Their signing indicates support of the commentary. In some cases, it indicates a general support but does not suggest agreement with all aspects of the paper.)

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Appendix 1

Statements of selected Irish healthcare professional associations regarding the situation in Gaza since 7 October 2023

Statements of selected Irish healthcare professional associations regarding the situation in Gaza since 7 October 2023

Professional Association	Statement on the situation in Gaza	Details of most recent updated statements / motions (as of 30th October 2024)
<p>Irish Nurses and Midwives Association (INMO)</p>	<p>INMO Statement of 13th October 2023</p> <p>“The INMO unequivocally condemns the scenes in Israel and Palestine that have occurred in the last week. Our thoughts and sympathies are with all those who are suffering because of the ongoing conflict in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Our fellow healthcare workers in Gaza need immediate international intervention and assistance as they desperately try to provide life-saving care in an impossible situation. We are urging the Irish Government to use their influence to ensure that the key asks of the World Health Organisation are listened to. With our colleagues in the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, we are seeking an urgent meeting with the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin”. “We echo the WHO’s call for hostages to be released and for them to receive medical treatment. Life-saving supplies should be provided to healthcare workers urgently. The support to those that provide care in a humanitarian crisis should never be conditional”.</p>	<p>INMO Statement of 30th October 2024</p> <p>“Members of the Irish nurses and midwives organisation strenuously object to the flagrant breaches of international humanitarian law by the deliberate targeting of healthcare settings and healthcare workers in the Middle East by the Israeli Defence forces. Our fellow healthcare workers in the Middle East need immediate international intervention and assistance as they desperately try to provide life-saving care in an impossible situation. The continued targeting of healthcare facilities and those who are trying to provide life-saving care is horrifying. Nurses, midwives, and all healthcare workers must be able to work free from threats of violence. Anyone who targets nurses, midwives, and healthcare workers and their workplaces should face justice. The targeting and killing of patients, nurses, midwives and healthcare workers in a conflict zone is a clear breach of the Geneva Conventions and entirely unacceptable. Our thoughts are with those who are trying their best to provide life-saving care in the most trying of circumstances in the Middle East. The Irish government must now do all it can to ensure that we are upholding our commitments to the World Health Organisation by bringing medically vulnerable children and their carers to Ireland for life-saving care”.</p>
<p>Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW)</p>	<p>IASW Statement 18 October 2023</p> <p>“IASW Statement on Middle East Conflict: Social workers condemn all violence against innocent civilians and call for an end to hostilities and the commencement of real steps to build a lasting peace</p> <p>The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) deplores the recent and ongoing deep suffering and loss of life visited on the people of Israel and Palestine. IASW condemns all acts of terrorism and war crimes committed in the ongoing conflict, especially the targeting, killing and injuring of civilians, including men, women and especially children. The withdrawal of vital life resources, including food, water, electricity and fuel, the bombing of densely populated areas, the forced displacement of civilians, the abduction of men, women and children, the taking of hostages and the killing and injury of so many children in particular, all constitute war crimes. The denial of basic necessities to those in Gaza , along with restricted access to medical care and humanitarian aid, is a clear infringement on their fundamental</p>	<p>1. Updated IASW statement 12th January 2024</p> <p>“The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) notes with deepening concern and condemns the ongoing murderous conflict in the Palestinian territories, especially in Gaza. We deplore the steadily rising death and injury toll among the civilian population, the clear and widespread disregard for human rights, particularly the right to life. We call for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, and access to immediate humanitarian aid for those who need it. IASW reiterates our condemnation of all acts of terrorism and war crimes committed in the ongoing conflict, especially the targeting, killing and injuring of civilians, including men, women and children. As we stated previously, the withdrawal and denial of access of vital life resources, including food, water, electricity and fuel, the bombing of densely populated areas, the forced displacement of civilians, the abduction of men, women and children, the taking of hostages and the killing and injury of so many children in particular, all constitute clear infringements of fundamental rights, in violation of International Human Rights Law. The resulting humanitarian crisis impacts most severely on the well-being and survival of the most vulnerable in the population: including women, children, people with</p>

	<p>human rights, in violation of International Human Rights Law. The resulting humanitarian crisis impacts most severely on the well-being and survival of the most vulnerable in the population: including women, children, people with disabilities, elderly people and people with medical needs who are reliant on access to medical care.</p> <p>The impact of the actions of the past ten days is already enormous, as those on both sides of the conflict mourn their losses and struggle to deal with its traumatic outfall. While feelings in the region are now greatly intensified and it appears that the situation is deteriorating inexorably, we call for an immediate end to the violence and for the restoration of opportunities to provide humanitarian relief to those who need it, to begin to repair the terrible damage already done and work towards building a lasting peace in the region.</p> <p>The social work profession is founded on a fundamental respect for basic human rights, social justice, and the right of all people and communities to live in freedom, with self-determination. Irish social workers echo the appeals of bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families who have called for an end to war and the immediate start of peace negotiations. As well as calling for an immediate end to the current hostilities, we urge all those in a position to do so, to take the necessary steps to broker and enable real peace in the region. We stand with all those impacted and affected by the current conflict and send our support to victims of the war in both Palestine and Israel.</p> <p>IASW also sends our heartfelt support to our social work colleagues in both Palestine and Israel, as they continue to work to respond to the deepening humanitarian crisis, and we support the recent statement from the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)"</p>	<p>disabilities, elderly people and people with medical needs who are reliant on access to medical care. The actions taken against the people of Palestine constitute, as described by UN experts, a 'genocide in the making.'</p> <p>The social work profession is founded on a fundamental respect for basic human rights, social justice, and the right of all people and communities to live in freedom, with self-determination. Irish social workers again echo the appeals of bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families and others who have called for an end to the war and the immediate start of peace negotiations. As well as calling for an immediate end to the current hostilities, we urge all those in a position to do so, to take the necessary steps to broker and enable real peace in the region. We stand with all those impacted and affected by the current conflict and send our support to victims of the war in both Palestine and Israel. As the ongoing war progresses to ever-deeper levels of depravity in Gaza, with the killing and abduction of humanitarian workers including some social workers, we express our solidarity with the people of Gaza and Palestine and with all our social work colleagues in the region.</p> <p>In his New Year's Eve message, President Michael D. Higgins stated that: "It is incumbent on all nations to redouble their efforts for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages and to set about the tasks of achieving a lasting peace, one which can allow the Palestinian people to realise their rights alongside those of a secure Israel" and pointing out that: "It is not morally acceptable to be indifferent." The collective wellbeing of the people of Gaza is increasingly precarious. In a grim assessment of the devastating impact of Israel's military response to the horrific Hamas attacks on 7 October, Martin Griffiths of the UN has said that Gaza's 2.3 million people face "daily threats to their very existence," while the world just watches, and that: "Tens of thousands of people, mostly women and children, have been killed or injured, families are sleeping in the open as temperatures plummet and areas where Palestinians were told to relocate have been bombed. Famine is around the corner."</p> <p>As Social Workers, we cannot ignore the ongoing destruction of innocent lives, and the horrific destruction and continued abuse of core human rights in Palestine. The killing and murderous devastation must stop now.</p> <p>IASW has called on the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) to issue a statement, calling for an immediate ceasefire and an expression of solidarity with the people of Palestine and for the immediate provision of access to humanitarian aid."</p> <p>1. On 31st May 2024 The IASW endorsed a statement written by an international, informal group of social workers.</p>
College of	CPsychI released a Press Statement:	CPsychI released a Second statement on violence

<p>Psychiatrists of Ireland (CPsychI)</p>	<p>Conflict and violence in Gaza, Israel and the Middle East on 13 November 2023</p> <p>“The College abhors all violence and conflict and is deeply concerned for all those tragically affected by violent attacks in Israel and Palestine and the humanitarian crisis that continues to escalate in Gaza and surrounding areas in the Middle East.</p> <p>The horrific and devastating deaths of civilians in the region – innocent human beings – is beyond comprehension. The situation causes us great shock and sadness. Our thoughts and compassion are with those who have endured horrific losses of children, spouses, partners, other family members, and friends and neighbours in their communities.</p> <p>We call on all parties to abide by the international humanitarian laws to protect and provide for those particularly vulnerable – children, people with intellectual disabilities and all those with illness. We are also acutely mindful of, and stand in solidarity with, our psychiatry and medical colleagues in the regions trying to provide medical assistance and support under extremely difficult and unpredictable circumstances.</p> <p>We also stand with and acknowledge the worry and distress being felt by our colleagues, members and trainees in Ireland who are from the affected regions.</p> <p>The College feels compelled to make a statement as “for evil to thrive, good needs to do nothing.”</p> <p>Members, trainees and fellows may wish to donate to appropriate organisations such as the Irish Red Cross and MSF.”</p>	<p>in the Middle East on 21 February 2024</p> <p>“The College is appalled and distressed at the accelerating violence in the Middle East, the increasing loss of human lives and the intensification of horrific effect on innocent civilians.</p> <p>We remain deeply concerned for the devastation inflicted on all, particularly the irreparable injury to children and vulnerable citizens and the long-term consequences for them. Our medical and healthcare colleagues, who continue to attempt to provide medical intervention and care in beyond impossible situations and depleted medical facilities, are also uppermost in our thoughts.</p> <p>A peaceful, non-violent solution is needed for all. To reiterate: “for evil to thrive, good needs to do nothing.”</p> <p>”</p>
<p>Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists (ISCP)</p>	<p>Three statements were issued. The first two are no longer available online. The third (see next column) is current at the time of writing.</p>	<p>6 June 2024 ISCP statement on the conflict in Gaza</p> <p>As an organisation representing healthcare professionals, the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists (ISCP) calls for a ceasefire and the protection of all civilians, including healthcare personnel, in Israel and Gaza. The ISCP is alarmed by the number of healthcare professionals, including physiotherapists, who have been killed in Gaza, and is deeply concerned by reports of the targeting of healthcare facilities and detainment of healthcare workers. The ISCP calls on all parties to the conflict to respect medical neutrality during conflict, and to ensure access to healthcare as a human right. The organisation affirms the lifesaving necessity for sustained humanitarian access to healthcare supplies, medicine, and rehabilitation for all those in need. The ISCP supports the World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA) Statement on the conflict in Israel and Gaza. The ISCP extends its condolences to all those who have lost loved ones in the conflict and expresses its</p>

		hope for the safe return of all hostages and detainees to their families, as well as commending all healthcare personnel providing care to those affected.”
Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP)	<p>ICGP Statement 4 June 2024</p> <p>“The violence in the Gaza Strip, Israel and the surrounding region has led to a massive humanitarian crisis, with thousands of deaths and injuries amongst civilians and medical personnel, including attacks on healthcare facilities. For each week that goes by, the situation on the ground is deteriorating.</p> <p>Many civilians, and those working in healthcare including doctors and medical professionals, have been killed in the conflict since it began in October 2023.</p> <p>The Irish College of GPs represents over 4,000 GPs in Ireland. It expresses deep concern and urges all sides in this conflict to respect international law. The College calls for the protection of healthcare facilities and personnel and the reopening of crossings to ensure humanitarian aid can be delivered safely.</p> <p>The Irish College of GPs urges both sides in this conflict to seek a peaceful solution, to end the violence in the region, and support the urgent humanitarian needs of the population.”</p>	No further statements, motions or action.
The Hospital Pharmacists Association of Ireland (HPAI)	HPAI have not released an independent statement . HPAI sits within the FORSA Trade Union who have released a statement which does not refer to healthcare.	No statement, motions or action.
The Irish Pharmacy Union	No statement and <i>no official endorsement</i> of the statement by the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) .	No statement, motions or action.
Association of Occupational Therapists in Ireland (AOTI)	AOTI have declined to make a statement , but in November 2023 aligned themselves with the statement of the World Federation of Occupational Therapy .	No statement or motions. A meeting was held between AOTI board members and members of Irish OTs for Palestine in August 2024 to listen to concerns. As of October 2024 no AOTI statement has been issued.
Irish Association of Speech & Language Therapists (IASLT)	IASLT have declined to make a statement despite multiple requests from members.	No statement, motions or action.

Note: clickable links direct to an archived version of the page to maintain stable access to the statement as it existed at the time of writing.