

# The European Society for Emergency Medicine (EUSEM) position on the health and humanitarian crisis in Gaza

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The European Society for Emergency Medicine (EUSEM), the scientific society representing emergency medicine professionals across Europe, is voicing its horror concerning the current situation of the civilians in Gaza. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that numerous hospitals have been destroyed or rendered nonfunctional, and in the north, there are no fully operational hospitals left standing [1]. The population is thus denied even the most basic health services and any specialized care including maternal and neonatal health, trauma surgery, and cancer treatment is largely unavailable. Concurrently, the spread of infectious diseases has intensified, driven by the destruction of water and sanitational infrastructures, severe overcrowding, and limited access to preventive and primary care. The destruction of Gaza's health infrastructure will definitely contribute to increased morbidity and mortality even beyond the period of active hostilities [2,3]. Healthcare professionals, operating under extremely difficult and dangerous conditions, have been directly targeted, with over 1400 medical personnel reportedly killed [3]. The courageous healthcare professionals who are brave enough to remain are overwhelmed by the workload, working with minimal supplies and at significant personal risk. The limited quantities of humanitarian assistance allowed to enter are grossly insufficient.

In addition, numerous international agencies, including the WHO [4] and the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Initiative, have confirmed that the entire population of Gaza is experiencing extreme and prolonged food insecurity. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, the entire Gaza Strip is currently at Phase 4, with the United Nations (UN) just declaring a state of famine in some parts and indicating widespread famine as an imminent threat to the entire region [5].

EUSEM cannot remain indifferent as the humanitarian and health crisis deepens with devastating impact on

patients and healthcare workers. While we firmly condemn war, we recall that international humanitarian law exists to protect civilian populations caught in conflict. EUSEM refuses to be a silent witness to the flagrant violations of these protections. We call upon the international community to take a clear stance and urge all parties to uphold their obligations under the Geneva Conventions, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention [6]. The security of healthcare professionals and health facilities and the immediate and unimpeded access of necessary humanitarian aid to the civilian population are clearly identified in the Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC) as well as stipulated in the Rules of Engagement, namely rules 53–55 [7,8]. Any and all violations of LOAC are war crimes.

Emergency medicine is founded on the principle that timely care saves lives – and that access to such care is a universal, fundamental right. The motto of 'Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere' expresses emergency medicine's unwavering commitment to providing immediate and equitable care to all, and this requires a safe working environment for healthcare professionals.

## Acknowledgements

### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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