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Analysis of Medical NGO Agendas and Distortions on the Gaza Conflict

Political advocacy NGOs that claim a medical mandate, as well as affiliated individuals, have been active in publicly and falsely condemning Israel's self-defense measures in Gaza during July 2014.

These NGOs and activists: 1) demonize Israel and use hate speech under the guise of medical expertise and scientific fact; 2) deny Israel's obligation to defend its citizens; 3) present political analysis, legal declarations, and speculations regarding Israel's military operations and weaponry, far beyond the scope of any medical expertise they might possess; and 4) promote distorted and false narratives.

In addition, they completely ignore [Hamas' use of hospitals and ambulances for military purposes](#), as well as its systematic exploitation of civilians in Gaza as human shields. Statements also fail to acknowledge (and indeed claim otherwise) that despite persistent rocket fire and terrorist activity, [Israel operates a humanitarian field hospital in Gaza](#), and the Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings have remained open to supply humanitarian aid and essential supplies, including food and fuel, to Gaza.

Often, these entirely political claims and biases are amplified in medical journals. For example, a number of NGO doctor-activists, including [Mads Gilbert](#) (NORWAC), Swee Ang ([Medical Aid for Palestinians](#)), and Paola Manduca (New Weapons Committee), published [An Open Letter for the People in Gaza](#) (July 23, 2014) in *The Lancet*, a UK medical journal. Under the guise of presenting "the facts," they demonize Israel for "the perversity of a propaganda that justifies the creation of an emergency to masquerade a massacre." (In response, the Israeli Ministry of Health reportedly identified the letter as "[bordering on blood libel](#).")

For further details, analysis, and background on this phenomenon, including examples of such statements from previous armed conflicts, see: [NGO Malpractice - The Political Abuse of Medicine, Morality, and Science](#), Gerald M. Steinberg and Naftali Balanson, NGO Monitor Monograph Series 11, July 29, 2013)

Excerpts from relevant NGO statements:

1) Using demonizing terms and other hate speech, under the guise of medical opinion and scientific fact

- Mads Gilbert (NORWAC), Swee Ang ([Medical Aid for Palestinians](#)), Paola Manduca (New Weapons Committee), and others, [An open letter for the people in Gaza](#), *The Lancet*, July 23, 2014: "We challenge the perversity of a propaganda that justifies the creation of an emergency to masquerade a massacre, a so-called 'defensive aggression'. In reality it is a ruthless assault of unlimited duration, extent, and intensity.... None of these are military objectives. These attacks aim to terrorise, wound the soul and the body of the people, and make their life impossible in the future..."
- [Health Work Committees \(HWC\)](#), Press release –[Palestinian medical and health organizations call on the Red Cross to act immediately to stop the massacre of civilians in Gaza and protect medical personnel and emblems](#), July 21, 2014: "...**amassacre of civilian populations** who have nowhere to run in the open air prison created for them by their attacker."
- HWC, Press release – [Health Work Committees calls for stopping the Israeli invasion on Gaza Strip](#), July 13, 2014: "The **Israeli Occupation** continues on its **systematic and violent war** against the Palestinians in Gaza Strip targeting **all means of living Including the humans, the trees and the stones** without regarding who to get

killed or to how they get killed... **martyrs...that a target by the systematic punishment of the deadly military machine.**"

- HWC, Open letter – [Stop the Genocide](#), July 21, 2014: **"The innocent citizens of Gaza Strip have been facing terrifying committed genocide against them by the Israeli occupying forces.....This has been occurring while the so-called civilized world has remained silent without taking any action to stop the horrible genocide. Instead, many Western Countries have been Supporting Israel in their invasion for the Palestinians."**
- [Medecins Sans Frontieres \(MSF\)/Doctors Without Borders, Opinion and Debate: The limits of humanitarianism in Gaza](#), July 14, 2014: "MSF is continuing to work in **an open-air prison to patch up prisoners in between their torture sessions**...However, the prison guards are the ones who have the capacity to launch large scale and highly destructive attacks on the open-air prison..."

2) Denying Israel's obligation to defend its citizens

- [Palestinian Medical Relief Society \(PMRS\), Facebook status, July 13, 2014](#): "As you all know by now, almost a week ago, **under the false pretense of self-defense**, Israel launched yet a new deadly massive attack on Gaza...It is time to finally debunk once and for all the Israeli narrative....**No, Hamas and other groups are not the aggressors. No, there is no right to self-defense...There is no such thing as restraint...The war Israel is waging on Gaza right now is not about self-defense.**"
- [The Lancet letter](#), July 23, 2014: "Under the **pretext of eliminating terrorism**, Israel is trying to destroy the growing Palestinian unity. **Among other lies, it is stated that civilians in Gaza are hostages of Hamas whereas the truth is that the Gaza Strip is sealed by the Israelis and Egyptians.**"
- [Norwegian Physician Treating Wounded Civilians: Stop the Bombing, End Israeli Impunity in Gaza](#)(interview with Mads Gilbert), Democracy Now, July 14, 2014: "Israelis are accusing the Palestinians of attacking them; **they have to defend themselves, they claim**. Actually, the truth is the exact opposite. **Israel is the attacker, the occupant**. Internationally, they are responsible, according to the law, for the security and the well-being of the occupied population, whereas in fact **Israel is doing their utmost to kill them and to make their life as miserable as possible** through these seven years of siege....**the main problem in the Middle East today..it is the Israeli impunity...the real oppressor, and the real criminal here...it is the State of Israel.**"

3) Making claims beyond medical expertise

Political claims

- [Norwegian Physician Treating Wounded Civilians: Stop the Bombing, End Israeli Impunity in Gaza](#)(interview with Mads Gilbert), Democracy Now, July 14, 2014: "As a **Medical Doctor**, you know, my appeal is: **Don't send bandages. Don't send syringes. Don't send medical teams. The most important medical thing you can do now is to force Israel to stop the bombing, and it is to lift the siege of Gaza.** Then the Palestinians will manage well themselves."
- [Physicians for Human Rights-Israel \(PHR-I\), An open letter](#), no date: "Years of intensifying control and closure of Gaza on the one hand, and the absence of activity to promote a just solution and end to the occupation on the other hand, is leading us into the abyss, fanning the flames of hatred and revenge that undermine the basis on which a healthy society rests."

Legal claims

- ["Norwegian Doctor Mads Gilbert speaks to MEMO about treating the wounded in Gaza,"](#) Middle East Monitor, July 23, 2014: "...**this is slaughter, this is a crime against humanity...this is of course huge war crimes**...that somebody is held accountable for this mass murder...that Israel's impunity is brought to an end...**that the Israeli war crimes and Israeli war criminals are taken to the International Criminal Court...and given due court proceedings...Israel shows no respect for international law...Israel respects absolutely no international laws.**"
- [The Lancet letter](#), July 23, 2014: "If those of us capable of speaking up fail to do so and take a stand against this **war crime**, we are also complicit in the destruction of the lives and homes of 1.8 million people in Gaza."
- HWC, Press release – [Palestinian medical and health organizations call on the Red Cross to act immediately to stop the massacre of civilians in Gaza and protect medical personnel and emblems](#), July 21, 2014: "...thousands and hundreds of thousands have been displaced in **what looks uncannily like an act of ethnic cleansing**.....We urge the Red Cross to hold true to its responsibility as depository of the **Geneva Conventions** and **intervene immediately to stop the massacre**....We also demand that the **UN take the necessary steps to place civilians in Gaza under the protection of the international community**.....Protected people **must be protected by the international community who bears the duty under international law**. We, the Palestinian medical and health organizations signing this appeal, demand immediate **intervention** to save the people of Gaza. **Anyone who remains silent in the face of this massacre is complicit.**"
- HWC, Open letter – [Stop the Genocide](#), July 21, 2014: "Health Work Committees calls for: **1. The Importance of ending the genocide in Gaza Strip immediately without any delay. 2. The Palestinian Authority to submit lawsuits to international courts and organizations to bring criminal Zionists to trial...4. The appreciation of all forms of local and international initiatives for boycotting the occupation** and the implementation of these initiatives."
- HWC, Press release – [Health Work Committees calls for stopping the Israeli invasion on Gaza Strip](#), July 13, 2014: "Also, attention should be given to the **collective punishment** against our people in Gaza Strip. We hold the United States of America and all the supporter of the **Zionist Terrorism** against the Palestinian nation, all accountable for what is happening and we consider it a partner in the **crime to approach all the organizations and international courts to condemn the criminal occupation for their crimes.**"
- [Norwegian Physician Treating Wounded Civilians: Stop the Bombing, End Israeli Impunity in Gaza](#)(interview with Mads Gilbert), Democracy Now, July 14, 2014: "**If there is one nation firmly supported by the US, which is violating the Geneva Convention, violating the international treaties, in all aspects, it is Israel.**"
- PHR-I, Press release– ["Ten Human Rights Organizations Send an Urgent Letter to the Attorney General: Concerns Regarding Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law in the IDF's Operations in Gaza,"](#) July 21, 2014: This information raises concerns about **grave violations of international humanitarian law**... The organizations demanded that the Attorney General instruct the government to refrain from **violating the laws of war and re-evaluate its aggressive policy and rules of engagement**... In this case, **serious concern is raised concerning the legality of the operation, an in particular, the potential violation of the fundamental principles of the laws of war, specifically the principle of distinguishing between combatants and civilians.**

Claims regarding military operations and weaponry

- [The Lancet letter](#), July 23, 2014: "**Weaponry known to cause long-term damages on health of the whole population are used; particularly non fragmentation weaponry and hard-head bombs**....we constantly see that **so-called intelligent weapons fail to be precise**, unless they are deliberately used to destroy innocent lives."

- ["Norwegian Doctor Mads Gilbert speaks to MEMO about treating the wounded in Gaza,"](#) Middle East Monitor, July 23, 2014: "The State of Israel is writing **out capital punishment....killing them deliberately with those awful weapons.**"
- ["Professor Mads Gilbert: Suspicion that Gaza is being used to test new weaponry,"](#) Press TV (Iran), July 14, 2014: "...**Everybody suspects that they are testing out new weapons...I am a medical doctor and a scientist and I don't have the proof but I think it is a reasonable suspicion that the Israeli army is testing new weaponry on the population in Gaza...if they are using new types of weapons now, we don't know yet.**"

4) Promoting distorted and false narratives

- ["Norwegian Doctor Mads Gilbert speaks to MEMO about treating the wounded in Gaza,"](#) Middle East Monitor, July 23, 2014: "...**they bomb the hospitals...I have never seen any Palestinian hospital contain missiles and rockets** and you have to pose that question to WHO and UNWRA who by in large are looking after the hospitals."
- Mads Gilbert, ["Israel-Gaza conflict: Doctor Mads Gilbert evokes conditions in a Gaza hospital,"](#) The Independent, July 20, 2014: "...all sorts of injured Palestinians, all ages, **all civilians, all innocent.**"
- [Norwegian Physician Treating Wounded Civilians: Stop the Bombing, End Israeli Impunity in Gaza](#)(interview with Mads Gilbert), Democracy Now, July 14, 2014: "**They don't even respect hospitals...Why don't they open corridors so that the hospitals in Gaza can have supplies...why don't they open Erez...to evacuate those severely injured that need to be treated abroad...Even those very very basic permissions which are anchored in international law is denied the Palestinians.**"
- PHR-I – Press release - ["Three days and nights of despair: PHR-Israel team worked to facilitate the evacuation of six residents of Khuza'a,"](#) July 27, 2014: "In many cases the condition of the wounded, **denied access to medical help**, worsened and **in some cases civilians even lost their lives while waiting for help to come.** For those who were not injured but were under siege, in addition to the risk of injury from fire, they faced a life-threatening situation simply because **they lacked water, food and basics - they could not go out to fetch these without facing a real risk to their lives and safety...** Throughout the days while they waited for evacuation the **army continued with fire that prevented ambulances and rescue teams of the Red Crescent reaching the wounded and besieged.**"