CONDEMNING ATTACKS BY ISRAELI DEFENCE FORCES PERSONNEL ON HEALTH CARE WORKERS AND PALESTINIANS

STATEMENT BY THE WORLD FEDERATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATIONS (WFPHA)

On Sunday 20 May 2018, the General Assembly of the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA) unanimously supported this statement to condemn the attacks by the Israeli defense forces personnel on health care workers and Palestinians.

As of May 15, 2018, Palestinian health authorities report over 100 Palestinians living in Gaza, including children, killed by Israeli Defense Forces personnel over the previous six weeks. More than a thousand people have been wounded. The majority were reportedly unarmed demonstrators. The Palestinians were protesting along the northern border with Israel, demanding the ‘Right to Return’ to mark the 70th anniversary of what Palestinians call the Nakba (Catastrophe), when hundreds of thousands of Arabs living in what was then Palestine were expelled or fled when the state of Israel was created in 1948.

Among those killed and injured were health care workers who were attending to the injured. They were reportedly targeted by Israeli Defense Force snipers, following Israeli Government directives.

In May 2011, the WFPHA approved a position paper on Armed Conflict and War. The WFPHA recommended that public health professionals become active advocates for legislation related to the arms trade, the ratification of treaties and protocols related to war and conflict and the development of initiatives that address the structural causes of war. The position paper highlights the protection and security of health care workers and health-supporting infrastructures. In April 2012, the WFPHA endorsed a call by the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition urging the World Health Assembly to adopt a resolution passed by the Executive Board of the World Health Organization (WHO) formalizing WHO’s role to document attacks on health facilities, workers, transports and patients in conflict areas.

The WFPHA condemns the attacks by the Israeli Defense Forces on both health personnel providing medical assistance/aid to Palestinians in Gaza who were demonstrating and as well on Palestinian demonstrators. The WFPHA also condemns the Government of Israel’s ‘shoot to kill’ policy which has killed hundreds and injured thousands of Palestinians who were protesting at the border. The State of Israel does not have the right to shoot people indiscriminately.

“Given the 2018 global emphasis on universal health coverage and human rights, the actions of the Israeli Defense Forces are abhorrent”, says Professor Laetitia Rispel, the new president of the WFPHA.

The WFPHA commends the Public Health Association of Israel and in general the public health community, human rights NGOs and civic society for providing emergency and medical assistance to people in need, regardless of their nationality, and for its ongoing efforts to ensure that the human rights of all people are protected.

The WFPHA calls on the World Health Assembly to condemn the actions of the Israeli Defense Forces. It also calls upon the WHO to increase its assistance to multilateral agencies and non-state organizations that provide health services to Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank. The WFPHA calls upon the United Nations to ensure the protection of the human rights of all people, to encourage the relevant stakeholders to return to the negotiating table, and to increase its efforts to bring a just resolution to the Middle East conflicts and the needs of people living in desperate conditions in Gaza.