

EDITORIAL

Social Medicine and Genocide

La Medicina Social y el genocidio

Editorial Board

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71164/socialmedicine.v18i3.2025.2339>

Shortly after the right-wing, ethno-supremacist government in power in Israel initiated its genocidal assault on Palestinian people of Gaza, *Social Medicine* registered its opposition. The November 2023 issue of *Social Medicine* /included “Hospitals, health and death in Gaza” by Marcos Arana-Cedeño,¹ and “A Call to Action: An Open Letter from Global Health Professionals. Signed By Over 3000 Global Health Professionals.”²

We social medicine practitioners thus joined the worldwide call to halt to the genocide. We spoke on behalf of the people’s health, in concert with protesters, including many Jewish activists, worldwide; the U.N. General Assembly; major human rights organizations; and subsequently the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

Yet, over a year and a half later, with a death toll far in excess of the official numbers, with many more injured, tortured, raped, and orphaned, with Gaza reduced to rubble – the genocide continues. Israel deliberately targets schools, hospitals, and health care providers. It blocks the entry of food, water, electricity, medicines, and aid workers – while bombing displaced people in tents.

Insofar as our task as social medicine practitioners is to understand the social determination³ of sickness and early death, we must understand what obstructs Health for All. We had thought of “Health for All” to be a universal human value. We had thought that in the spirit of internationalism, the aspiration for Health for All was spreading worldwide. The ongoing genocide belies this belief. The ongoing genocide makes evident that we were naïve to think this way.

We social medicine practitioners examine large-scale social forces in order to understand social determination. We social medicine practitioners look to history and political economy in order to understand present-day morbidity and mortality. In the case of genocide, we focus on the inherent settler colonialist nature of Israel and its ideological underpinnings of Zionism and racism. Scholars such as Ilan Pappè⁴ and Rashid Khalidi⁵ and journalists such as Chris Hedges⁶ inform us of the historical context. Pankaj Mishra gives us an overview of the manner in which the Shoah, the genocide of European Jews by the Nazis, came to serve as ideological justification for the Zionist project of apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and now, the final solution of genocide.⁷

We citizens of nations who fund, manufacture and supply the weapons, and provide diplomatic cover to the genocidal project are complicit. The media, which refuses to use the term “genocide”, is complicit. This is the moral and ethical issue of our time. It is therefore our responsibility as social medicine practitioners, as internationalists, to oppose the genocide.

Such actions by Israel leading to deaths, injuries, and destruction of facilities needed for survival do not happen only in Palestine. Israel has participated in or supported militarily other genocides and repressive governments around the world. These actions have led to devastating effects on health and survival for many countries in South America, Central America, the Caribbean, North America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania.⁸ Israel has described Palestine as a “laboratory” to test armaments, surveillance systems, and military tactics and strategies so that the Israeli government and Israeli

corporations can sell them to dictators and repressive governments far from Palestine.⁹

The tide of public opinion, especially among the young, has turned against genocide. Students, risking their diplomas and their future careers, inspire the rest of us. Cowardly university administrators allow their own students be arrested and have their visas suspended. As noted above, however, worldwide protests and pronouncements have thus far failed to stop the genocide. The financial and ideological power wielded by the Zionists and their supporters has so far proven to be too robust. The forces arrayed against us try to smear us by charging us with anti-Semitism. As social medicine practitioners, however, we are staunch anti-racists and detest anti-Semitism. We stand together in solidarity against such slander.

The moral lines are clear. The supporters of genocide want a future in which all will be constantly surveilled, in which the haves and the have-nots will be separated by razor wire, in which unwanted populations will be denied food, water, and shelter, then killed by sniper fire and bombs.

For the sake of the lives of the people of Gaza, we must keep up our efforts. However, we write this not just for the sake of Gaza, but for the sake of all possible future victims of any genocide, because each successful genocide emboldens others. Our tasks include cutting through the ideological and propagandistic smokescreens. We call out those on

the wrong side of the moral divide. By forging a social determination of health approach to genocide – we strategize to oppose it on all fronts.

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Social Medicine

Health For All

ISSN: 1557-7112