

1375, boul. St. Laurent Blvd., Ottawa, ON K1G 0Z7
Tel./Tél. : (613) 237-1590 Fax/Téléc. : (613) 237-5508 Toll free/Sans frais : (844) 237-1590
cupemail@cupe.ca/courriel@scfp.ca – cupe.ca/scfp.ca

April 9, 2025

BY E-MAIL
melanie.joly@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister:

Re: Protect Palestinian health care workers and end the genocide

On behalf of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), we are writing to raise alarm about the conditions of health care workers in Palestine. As Canada's largest union representing paramedics, emergency workers and other first responders, the news from Gaza that Israel executed a convoy of 15 medical personnel and emergency workers on March 23, 2025, is deeply disturbing. This follows credible reports of hundreds of attacks on health care workers including workers being detained by Israel under brutal conditions including physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, starvation, and medical neglect. We are demanding the Canadian government take immediate action to stop the genocide.¹

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) grants medical personnel [special protection](#) under Geneva Conventions and yet, Israel continues to attack and detain health care workers with impunity. According to the [United Nations](#) and the World Health Organization's [latest figures](#), 1,057 health workers have been killed and 517 have been detained in Gaza and the West Bank since October 7, 2023. Medical facilities, including hospitals, have been attacked 739 times despite also being protected under IHL. These figures have increased since Israel ended the ceasefire on March 18, 2025, and occur in a context where more than 50,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 9,500 are [detained](#) by Israel as political prisoners.

.../2

¹ Amnesty International. December 2024: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/amnesty-international-concludes-israel-is-committing-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/>

MARK HANCOCK
National President/Président national

CANDACE RENNICK
National Secretary-Treasurer/Secrétaire-trésorière nationale

PATRICK GLOUTNEY, FRED HAHN, SHERRY HILLIER, GINA MCKAY, KAREN RANALLETTA
General Vice-Presidents/Vice-présidences générales

On March 23, 2025, ambulance crews and civil defense rescue workers from the Palestinian Red Crescent (PRCS) were sent to the scene of an Israeli airstrike in Rafah. Their bodies, and those of their colleagues who tried to rescue them, were recovered 8 days later, buried in a mass grave. The head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Gaza [posted](#) publicly that: “They were killed in their uniforms. Driving their clearly marked vehicles. Wearing their gloves. On their way to save lives. This should never have happened”.

A [report](#) released by Physicians for Human Rights – Israel in February 2025, includes testimonies from several detained Palestinian health care workers, many who were taken from their workplaces, such as hospitals and medical facilities, or from their homes. The report states, “From the moment of the arrest in Gaza, through transportation, and later in Israeli detention facilities, detainees endure physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, as well as starvation and medical neglect amounting to torture.”² It further adds, “despite widespread reporting by international bodies, the inhumane conditions and abuse continue without consequences.”³

The ongoing detention of [Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya](#), a pediatrician and the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza, is a case in point. On December 27, 2024, the Israeli military raided his hospital and arbitrarily detained him, along with other medical staff and patients. The raid put the hospital, the last functioning major medical facility in Northern Gaza out of service. Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya was one of the most prominent voices in defense of Gaza’s decimated health care sector, and Israel continues to imprison and torture him with impunity. Given Israel’s track record, we fear he will not be released alive.

We have an obligation to hold Israeli authorities accountable to safeguard the rights and lives of all the people of Gaza, including the health care workers. As a party to the UN Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Canada has an obligation to “employ all reasonable means” to prevent and punish the crime of genocide wherever it occurs.

We are calling on the Government of Canada to impose a full and immediate 2-way arms embargo on Israel and to demand:

- the immediate release of all Palestinian health care workers being held in detention.
- the immediate suspension of attacks on health care workers and on hospitals, ambulances and health centres, and aid workers.
- accountability for violations of the international humanitarian and human rights law.

.../3

² https://www.phr.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/6265_DetentionReport_Eng.pdf. Page 3

³ https://www.phr.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/6265_DetentionReport_Eng.pdf. Page 20

- an immediate and permanent ceasefire.
- the blockade on food, medical and humanitarian aid to Gaza be lifted.

Taking action to protect Palestinian health care workers and to end the genocide is not a choice, it is our obligation. We urge you to act quickly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MH' followed by a stylized flourish.

MARK HANCOCK
National President

:cl/cope491

cc: The Right Honourable M. Carney, Prime Minister of Canada; D. Morrison, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs;
J. Singh, MP, NDP Leader; H. McPherson, MP, NDP Foreign Affairs Critic; Canadian Labour Congress