



IFMSA

International Federation of
Medical Students' Associations

PRESS RELEASE

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Statement on protection of health care services

The last week has seen the surge of violence in Syria's city of Aleppo, in which every hospital in the rebel-held east Aleppo has been damaged to the extent of putting them out of service (a statement confirmed by the World Health Organization), leaving more than 250,000 men, women, and children living in east Aleppo without access to health care. In light of this, the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) wants to reaffirm its firm stance against violations of International Humanitarian Law and attacks on health care workers, facilities and systems.

Whenever a patient, a nurse, a doctor or any other component of health care system is attacked, be it threats or actual violence, it has not only direct consequences for the affected and their health, but also on the health of the served populations, causing ripples across the delivery of health care. This disruption restricts the access to health care and is therefore a violation of human rights. In fact, violence against health workers and health facilities is a crime under the International Humanitarian Law, causing only death, destruction and disruption of basic health care services.

These attacks in Aleppo are only a small fraction of numerous attacks against health care workers, medical transports and facilities, which have taken place in several countries, like Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen, during the past years. Almost 200 health care workers lost their lives in more than 113 attacks against health care in the first half of 2016 [WHO]. These attacks place a heavy burden on fragile health care systems already affected by conflicts.

Guided and committed to IFMSA's policy statements on [Protection of Health Services](#) and [Assuring Access to Medical and Humanitarian aid in Syria \(adopted in March 2014\)](#), we repeatedly call all responsible actors to give urgent attention to attacks on health care.

We immediately call on the United Nations organs and commissions, which hold governments to account to fulfil their obligations under international human rights and international humanitarian law, to ensure the right to health, a right that is closely and inextricably linked to the rights to life, human dignity, non-discrimination, equality and the prohibition against torture and ill-treatment, is upheld. In order to advance the protection of health services and patients and by these means reach better health for all, there is a broad range of actions to be taken by a number of different actors. Among them, we consider it most important to call for:

All Parties to:



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- Recognize violence against the health sector as violation of International Humanitarian Law
- Respect International Humanitarian Law & Human Rights law, secure access to health care and safety of involved personnel, vehicles and facilities, and gather data on violence against the health sector in and out of conflict zones
- Highlight the occurrence of violence towards the health sector in reports on the health situation during disasters
- Unblock the humanitarian assistance to help the population that is caught up in the violence

Health Sector (including Medical Students) to:

- Take up own responsibilities, such as adhering to the Declaration of Geneva and treat every person in need according to his/her personal needs, without discrimination based on age, disease or disability, creed, ethnic origin, gender, nationality, political affiliation, race, sexual orientation, social standing or any other factor
- Advocate for better health services protection
- Promote the inclusion of disaster risk reduction knowledge in relevant sections of school curricula
- Promote International Humanitarian Law, human rights and the Declaration of Geneva and raise awareness on the topic among medical students, medical professionals as well as civil society
- Share information about first aid and medical procedures on platforms that people in Aleppo have access to, in order to encourage the ability of saving more lives

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The International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) envisions a world in which medical students unite for global health and are equipped with the knowledge, skills and values to take on health leadership roles locally and globally. Founded in 1951, it is one of the world's oldest and largest student-run organizations. It represents, connects and engages every day with an inspiring and engaging network of 1.3 million medical students from 130 national member organizations in 122 countries around the globe.

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