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## Letter from the Islamic Medical Association of South Africa (IMASA) to the World Medical Association (WMA)

### RE: Ethical Accountability and Medical Neutrality in Gaza

The Islamic Medical Association of South Africa (IMASA) wishes to convey its deep concern over the humanitarian and ethical crisis confronting the medical profession in Gaza. The repeated targeting of hospitals, ambulances, and medical personnel has placed the principles of medical neutrality and humanitarian ethics at grave risk, calling into question the integrity of international medical standards.

The recent editorial by Meriem Gaddas, Leslie London et al., published in *La Tunisie Médicale* (2025) and entitled “The World Medical Association (WMA) at a Crossroads: Confronting Medical Complicity and Preserving Ethics Amid Gaza War Crimes,” underscores the urgency of this moment. It outlines long-standing concerns about the Israeli Medical Association (IMA) and its failure to address credible reports implicating some members in acts that contravene international medical ethics, including alleged participation in or silence toward torture, ill-treatment of detainees, and the obstruction of medical access<sup>1</sup>.

Several recent investigations have provided corroborating evidence of systematic violations of medical neutrality. These include findings from the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry (A/79/232, 2024), the UN Special Rapporteur’s “Anatomy of a Genocide” Report (A/HRC/55/73, 2024), and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Provisional Order of 26 January 2024, all documenting the deliberate destruction of Gaza’s healthcare infrastructure<sup>2,3,4</sup>. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) Health Cluster (2025), more than 480 attacks on health facilities and ambulances have occurred since October 2023<sup>5</sup>.

In addition, the WHO Health Cluster and UN OCHA report that over 1,700 healthcare workers—including doctors, nurses, paramedics, and hospital staff—have been killed in Gaza since October 2023, with hundreds more injured or missing<sup>11</sup>. This represents the single largest loss of medical personnel in a conflict since the founding of the World Medical Association (WMA) and constitutes an unparalleled assault on global medical ethics and humanitarian law. Independent media reports, including *The Guardian* (Feb 2025) and

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Human Rights Watch (Aug 2024), further indicate that over 160 Palestinian health professionals remain in detention, many subjected to ill-treatment<sup>67</sup>.

The case of Dr Hussam Abu Safiya, Head of Paediatrics at Kamal Adwan Hospital, detained without charge and reportedly deprived of medical care, symbolises this crisis. His situation—and that of other detained healthcare workers—represents a direct breach of the WMA International Code of Medical Ethics (2022), which affirms that:

> “Physicians found guilty of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, or violations of medical ethics, human rights, or international law are unfit to practise medicine.”<sup>8</sup>

The Islamic Medical Association of South Africa (IMASA) has consistently engaged on this issue. Letters to the World Medical Association (WMA) in 2010 and 2014 raised these same ethical concerns, and in 2025 the South African Medical Association (SAMA) took the principled step of suspending relations with the IMA, affirming that ethical accountability must transcend political boundaries<sup>9</sup>. History further reminds us that the Medical Association of South Africa (MASA) was suspended from the WMA between 1975 and 1981 for its role in apartheid-era abuses<sup>10</sup>.

**In light of these developments, IMASA respectfully calls on the World Medical Association (WMA) to:**

1. Establish an independent inquiry into the conduct and silence of the Israeli Medical Association (IMA) regarding ethical violations.
2. Publicly call for the immediate release of Dr Hussam Abu Safiya and all detained healthcare professionals.
3. Suspend the membership of the Israeli Medical Association (IMA) pending the outcome of such inquiry, in keeping with historical precedent.
4. Create a standing WMA Task Force on Medical Neutrality to monitor and investigate attacks on health services in conflict zones.

This appeal is made in the spirit of professional solidarity and shared moral responsibility. The World Medical Association (WMA) was founded after the Second World War to reaffirm the ethical duties of physicians in the aftermath of widespread medical complicity in atrocities. The current crisis in Gaza represents a similar test of conscience.

We remain confident that the WMA will act decisively to uphold the principles of medical ethics, restore public trust, and demonstrate that the medical profession remains, above all, a guardian of humanity.

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