



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

For science. For action. For health.

February 19, 2020

His Excellency António Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations
3 Sutton Place
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Secretary-General:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals that champions the health of all people and communities, I write to urge you to stand against the attacks on health facilities in Syria and to make the full report of the United Nations Headquarters board of inquiry into these attacks public.

APHA strongly urges an end to the violent attacks on health workers and health facilities in wars and other armed conflict settings around the globe. Health workers in conflict settings strive to provide impartial and consistent care to all parties to the conflict, as well as civilians caught in the crossfire. They are increasingly under attack for this work, despite the legal protections afforded to them by the Geneva Conventions and other international laws.

We thank you for your decision to establish a board of inquiry to look into the incidents of damage to UN-supported and humanitarian facilities, including medical facilities, which constitutes an important step towards meaningful accountability. Attacks on health care facilities have been a defining feature of the ongoing conflict in Syria. From March 2011 through November 2019, Physicians for Human Rights corroborated 588 attacks on 350 separate facilities and documented the killing of 914 medical personnel. The newest attacks on Idlib this month are deeply concerning.

The terms of reference for the board of inquiry clearly require the findings of the investigation to be made public. The board is required to establish, where possible, specific and individual attribution for acts carried out; this is a vital step in supporting future accountability mechanisms. Additionally, the board's mandate should cover attacks on all health facilities, schools and other civilian infrastructure that have occurred or may occur while the investigation is ongoing.

As required by Security Council resolution 2286, the UN and its member states are to conduct "prompt, full, impartial, and effective investigations" of attacks and other forms of interference with health care in conflict settings. APHA urges your continued leadership on this issue in order for the UN to meaningfully achieve "peace, justice and strong institutions" as stated in Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals. In the interest of transparency, any findings related to breaches of international humanitarian law should be publicly released to ensure accountability.

Thank you for your attention to this important public health matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Georges" being the most prominent.

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director

Cc: The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo