

**Senior paediatricians and child health experts appeal:
Please help stop the war on children in Gaza
5 April, 2024**

As paediatricians and child health professionals we have committed our professional lives to promoting the physical and psychological health of children.

Every society places great importance on the care and protection of its children in addition to the dignity it attributes to all human lives.

War harms children disproportionately. It destroys their right to thrive in a peaceful environment and takes away their physical health, their security and their future.

The conflict between Palestine and Israel, both before and after October 7, is causing grave harm to children on both sides. Both Israeli and Palestinian children are being exposed to fear, privation, imprisonment and physical violence.

For the children of Gaza the deprivation and harms of war are now on a scale not seen in recent memory.

On 13 March, Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency Philippe Lazzarini stated that “This war is a war on children. It is a war on their childhood and their future”.

More children were reported killed in Gaza in the four months to February this year (over 12,300) than in all wars globally in the four years to 2022 (nearly 12,200). At least 17,000 children in Gaza are unaccompanied or separated from their parents, many of them being injured themselves.

Starvation – to which children are always the most vulnerable – is being used as a weapon. Michael Fakhri, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food states that “We’ve never seen children pushed into malnutrition so quickly”.

Five months of violence, displacement, starvation and disease is causing relentless mental harm to the children of Gaza that will stay with them life-long. They now face confusion, fear, pain and hunger.

The world knows all this. The Australian Government knows all this. Despite the efforts of UN and other agencies to stimulate action, and despite the desperate pleas from the people of Gaza, this disaster has been created and allowed to continue on our watch.

On March 28, the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to immediately ensure the “unhindered provision at scale” of food and other aid for the people of Gaza, strengthening its January 26 order with which Israel has failed to comply. The new order includes “increasing the capacity and number of land crossing points and maintaining them open for as long as necessary”.

We plead with the Australian Government, as a close friend and ally of Israel, to do everything in its power to stop this terrible, unprecedented war on children. We want our government not to repeat tired words but to take urgent, decisive political actions against the policies and the war machine that are perpetrating it. These actions include the following:

- Ending all military cooperation with Israel. Australia cooperates on defence matters with Israel in multiple ways. It exports military components to Israel and has contracts (including a new \$917m contract on 28 February), partnerships and investments that are aiding or profiting from the war on Gaza. All elements of this cooperation must cease immediately.
- Supporting – by declaration and action - the International Court of Justice orders that Israel provide all necessary food, medical care and other essential needs for the children and adults of Gaza, including by the opening of new entry points for aid; and working urgently to ensure that all necessary measures happen.

Without these and other actions, Australia will be complicit with the deliberate persecution of the children of Gaza. They deserve the same safety, security, care and hope that we demand for our own children.

SPOKESPEOPLE:

Professor Fiona Stanley AC FAA FASSA FAHMS, Distinguished Research Professor, University of Western Australia

Dr Suezanne Packer AO FRACP, 2019 Senior Australian of the Year

OTHER SIGNATORIES:

Professor Elizabeth Elliott AM FAHMS FRSN MD, Distinguished Professor in Paediatrics and Child Health, University of Sydney

Professor David Isaacs MD FRACP FRCPC

Kim Oates AO, Emeritus Professor, Discipline of Child and Adolescent Health, University of Sydney

John Yu AC FRACP FAHA, formerly Chief Executive of the Children's Hospital, Westmead

CONTACTS:

Professor Fiona Stanley: Fiona.Stanley@telethonkids.org.au

Dr Suezanne Packer: sue_packer2004@yahoo.co.uk