

**LANCET'S UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR**

In light of the recent publication of the biased and unethical letter in *The Lancet*, we urge that this letter be retracted and that the editor who cleared it for publication step down. The editor R. Horton has proved once and again that he is prejudiced against Israel, and he is using *The Lancet*, a medical journal, for political ends. Horton is a member of the Lancet Palestinian Health Alliance at Bir Zeit University, and of course has conflict of interests in this matter. David Feifel, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego, summed up the facts pertaining to this issue and it merits citing in *IMAJ*.

The letter, "An Open Letter for the People in Gaza" [1], is a highly partisan, demonstrably inaccurate and defamatory representation of the violence now taking place between the Israel Defense Forces and the terrorist group Hamas. The authors declared they had no competing interests, but Stall et al. [2] pointed out that two of the co-authors have affiliations with pro-Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In fact, that barely scratches the surface in terms of the potentially biasing conflicts. For example, the letter's first author, Paola Manduca, receives funding from several anti-Israel NGOs including Interpal [3], which has been designated a terrorist entity by the governments of the United States, Canada and Australia [4]. U.S. Federal authorities describe the organization as a global clearing-house channeling money to Hamas, and a BBC investigation came to the same conclusion [5-7]. Interpal is a founding member of the so-called Union of Good, an umbrella organization that funds Islamic terrorists in Gaza [8]. Its leader, Yussef al-Qaradawi, is a notorious jihadist

who has publically lauded Hitler for "putting Jews in their place" and has said of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: "We must plant the love of death and the love of martyrdom in the Islamic nation." The organization actively encourages Palestinian children to become martyrs and suicide bombers [5-7]. Manduca not only receives funding from Interpal but also raises money for it [9].

Is it any wonder then that Manduca is a signatory to the "Appeal for the removal of Hamas from the EU terror list" [10] and that her co-author, Mads Gilbert, is on record for supporting terror attacks against civilians including the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center [11] which took the lives of nearly 3000 innocent civilians? These revelations totally belie the authors' description of themselves as merely "doctors and scientists, who spend our lives developing means to care and protect health and lives." Are some of them, in fact, doctors and scientists with intellectual and financial links to terrorist entities with genocidal agendas? In violating the Lancet's published Declaration of Interests policy [12], Manduca et al. deprived Lancet readers of crucial contextual information with which to judge their polemical correspondence.

Considering these egregious omissions, The Lancet must immediately retract the Manduca letter in accordance with its own stated policy on such violations. Anything less would only add to the damage that has been done to Lancet's credibility by its editorial decision to publish this scurrilous correspondence which has been likened to a blood libel against the people of Israel [13,14]. This decision also violated both Elsevier's editorial policy of avoiding material that contains inaccuracy, bias and defamation [15], and the guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) – of which Lancet is a member – which states: "editors must make an effort to screen discourteous, inaccurate,

or libelous comments" [16]. Indeed, in two previous letters we pointed to Lancet's unethical behavior and its bias against Israel for using a medical journal for its own political agenda [17,18]. In light of these breaches of ethical behavior, the editor who allowed this publication, R. Horton, should step down.

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PS. We are adding two references that were recently published in *The Lancet* [19,20].

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### My Dear Friends,

We know each other as friends and colleagues, but this time I am writing to you as Gabriel Gurman, an Israeli citizen living in the south of the country. I decided to write to you because in the last month something quite unfortunate has occurred in our profession.

As you know, a small group of medical colleagues decided to publish in *The Lancet* an “open letter” to the people of Gaza, in which “*on the basis of our ethics and practice, we are denouncing what we witness in the aggression of Gaza by Israel.*” For someone who does not know the reality on the ground, this open letter would seem a sincere manifestation of rage against the inhuman attitude of Israel towards Gaza’s citizens and a declaration of solidarity with the poor, the oppressed and the victims of an unjustified aggression against a defenseless population by a cruel army.

It is not my intention to convince you to the contrary. You can check the facts and reach your own conclusions. I would just like to tell you what has been happening here in southern Israel over the past 9 years (or 14, depending on how one starts counting). For years, and without respite, we have been attacked. In 2001, 501 rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel. By 2008 this number had increased to 3278. The years in between were no more peaceful: from 661 rockets in 2002 to 2427 in 2007. This is the daily reality for those, like me, who live here.

The question is twofold: who is it that attacks us on a daily basis and why? The answer is complicated, but also very simple. Open the Hamas Charter of 1988. The full text can easily be found on the internet. The main goal of Hamas, as they themselves write, is to annihilate Israel and its population, to the very last Jew.

I am 75 years old, but I know my history. Hitler wanted to occupy Russia, but not kill *all* Russians. Stalin occupied Eastern Europe and transformed each country into a communist state, destroying their culture, civilization and economy and killing thousands and thousands of opponents, but he never wished to annihilate all the citizens of any of these countries. For the first time in modern history an ethnic group declares, in writing, that its core goal is to completely wipe a country entirely off the map and kill every citizen of Jewish origin.

But the Jews are not the only victims of this fanatic, fundamentalist, terror organization. The first and most tragic victims of Hamas’ brutality are the citizens of Gaza themselves. As one of their leaders claimed, “The difference between us and the Israelis is that “they fight to live while we fight to die.” While Israel was taking care of its citizens by creating effective means of defense, Hamas was building a cruel reality for Gazans characterized by:

- Merging its offensive weaponry among civilian population centers, knowing full well that innocent civilians would be the inevitable victims of Israeli retaliation

- Forcing civilians to defend Hamas military facilities
- Transforming every non-military building (houses, hospitals, UN schools, mosques) into caches for weapons, especially missiles
- Threatening Gaza residents against following IDF warnings (flyers, phone calls, etc.) to immediately evacuate buildings targeted for destruction.

The results of the last 45 days of combat in the south of Israel and the Gaza Strip show:

- On the Israeli side, almost 3000 missiles launched over the whole country, with three citizens killed
- In Gaza, some 5000 IDF air attacks, more than 2000 people killed, mostly citizens, women and children, most of whom lived in buildings transformed into arsenals and deposits for weaponry, and who did not have any means of defending themselves.

International law calls for Israel to attack proportionately. But international law did not envision an enemy that glorifies death and embraces it for its citizens. Nor does the terrible toll that Gazans have suffered make Israel’s fight against Hamas unfair, just as NATO’s offensive against Serbia was not unjust because of the civilian death toll that American air attacks inflicted.

My dear friends, I am not a politician, nor a strategist. I will not tell you about the danger that fundamentalist Islam represents to our civilization. But what I would ask you to do is write a letter to Dr. Richard Horton, editor of the *Lancet*, that esteemed scientific journal which published an article full of hate and bias, placing blame squarely at the hands of Israel and not with one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations in the world today.

In my opinion a doctor dedicated to his or her patient is someone who, before drawing a conclusion, checks the facts, makes a differential diagnosis, reads the pertinent literature and only then recommends a treatment. That is what I am

expecting from each of you and am sure you will not let me down.

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**To the Editor:**

**W**e, a group of doctors and directors of hospitals in northern Israel, write this letter in response to the “Open Letter to the People of Gaza” (‘the letter’) published electronically in *The Lancet* on 23 July 2014. We too work every day for the saving of lives without respect to race, creed or nationality. In our hospitals about 1000 casualties of the Syrian civil war have been given medical treatment of the highest dedication and standard, without charge [1-4]. It is to be noted with sadness that the authors of the letter have not yet found time to vent their anger and concern regarding this particular cruel war that has so far cost more than 190,000 lives [1].

We, who live and work in a democracy and have various political views, are united in our opinion that the above “letter” contains disinformation and is deliberately and dishonestly misleading for the otherwise uninformed reader. The distortions are beyond anything reasonably expected of medical professionals.

Residents of Gaza have natural human rights including a dignified life, prosperity, freedom of movement and education. These they are daily denied by a ferociously violent terrorist regime ( Hamas is so classified by the UN, EU, U.S. and others) that suppresses women, Christians, homosexuals and displays contempt for democratic values. Hamas has its declared object, as its own charter clearly states, the destruction of the State of Israel and killing of Jews [5,6]. The letter’s authors do not mention or condemn, even in passing, the endless missile attacks (at the time of writing over 2500 rockets and missiles have been launched at Israel during the

last two weeks) on cities and innocent citizens. Every missile is a war crime. This shows a lack of balance which is alien to a scientific journal. It shows the double standards adopted by the letter’s authors, who claim to be motivated by moral, ethical, and humanistic considerations.

Displays of rage against Israel, whose three young boys were kidnapped and brutally murdered by Hamas at the outset of this tragedy, are misplaced and simply prolong the enormous damage sustained by the Palestinian population of Gaza, all of which is Hamas’ responsibility. The attempt of the letter’s authors to grant legitimacy to a terror group that sanctions these acts is unacceptable, especially in a respected medical journal.

A medical journal is also not a suitable arena for geopolitical debate, but we believe the general reader should know that in 2005 Israel unilaterally evacuated all Israeli civilians and military personnel from Gaza. Until Hamas took control in a military coup in 2007 [7] (in which nearly 1000 Palestinians were killed by Hamas), the residents of Gaza carried on close economic and trade relations with Israel. Many Gazans enjoyed (and many doctors from our hospitals were personally involved in) medical treatment in clinics and hospitals in Israel. The so-called military blockade on Gaza stems solely from Israel’s need to prevent the entry of weapons and terror-tunnel building materials. This is crucial, since materials supposed to be used for civilian building have been diverted to the extensive network of underground military bunkers and terror tunnels throughout Gaza, currently being exposed and destroyed. Egypt has restricted its border for the same reasons [8,9].

Israel continues to supply food, medicines and other necessities, and continues to supply electricity to Gaza. Israel has opened a field hospital at the “Erez” crossing for the benefit of innocent Gazans and permits medical assistance in every way. Against this, hospitals in Gaza like Wafa Hospital have been documented as firing stages against Israeli forces [10]. In addition,

in three cases missile caches have been found in the precincts of UNRWA schools [11,12], a finding that has been condemned by the UN Secretary-General. Hamas’ refusal to agree to many cease-fires during the campaign reveals its murderous nature and cynical disregard for the lives of its own people. We are in the face of an unprecedented strategy designed to bring about the deaths of its own innocent people. This is a war crime without a name. Israel does not impede any third party (including Turkey) from importing supervised humanitarian aid into Gaza. One can only imagine the benefit the billions of dollars that have been given by donors to Gaza could have brought to Gazans if Hamas had not been the rulers.

We are saddened and pained by all victims of violence, especially children and women and other civilians who have been killed and injured in an unnecessary war that was forced on Israel by Hamas. We believe that when the world realizes that Israel is not fighting against Gazans but rather against a brutal Islamic terrorist organization that has taken an entire civilian population hostage, the true liberation of Gaza will begin.

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