

Statement on Children and Children's Healthcare in Conflict Zones

As an organisation dedicated to the nursing care of children and families, the Canadian Association of Paediatric Nurses (CAPN), deplores the ongoing devastation, denounces the continued violence and persecution, and mourns the loss of life, health and wellbeing that is a daily occurrence in many conflict zones around the globe (CAPN, n.d.). No matter where they are located, having to live among the violence of these zones creates inequalities and injustices harmful to the health and welfare of infants, children, and youth. Too many innocents have died, too many have been injured, too many have faced displacement, too many lack the basic necessities for survival, and for far too many, their future and their security is uncertain.

The effects that living in a conflict zone has on children are both direct and indirect. Direct effects include physical illness and injury, growth and developmental delays, disability, mental health and behavioural consequences, the death of family members and caregivers, and tragically, even the death of infants, children, and youth (AAP, 2018). Indirectly, the effects include destruction of necessary infrastructure (housing, health facilities, schools), environmental hazards exposure, and negative consequences for other social determinants of health (AAP, 2018). Ultimately, the results of these ongoing conflicts, whether direct or indirect, are continued grave violations of children's rights.

As paediatric advocates, invested in the health of all children and youth, we respect children's rights, and we stand firm in the knowledge and belief that every child deserves to live and grow without fear of pain, violence, or trauma (CHC, 2023). We must continue to advocate for child health: for access to basic necessities - healthy food, clean water, safe shelter, along with the provision of education and schooling. We must use our voice and privilege to condemn all forms of violence, racism and discrimination (CPS, 2024).

CAPN calls on all parties in conflict zones to abide by international humanitarian law, to respect the Geneva Conventions, to enable and allow delivery of appropriate aid to those in need, and to protect and ensure safe access to healthcare facilities for those ill and injured (CNA, 2023; ICN, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). Health is a human right, yet attacks on health systems continue with



catastrophic consequences. We are grateful and supportive to all those who have and continue to risk everything to care for infants, children, and youth on the frontlines of conflict zones by working in untenable, unimaginable conditions. Nurses and other healthcare providers deliver emergency medical care in the conflict areas with no regard to ethnicity, race, religion or political affiliation and as such are also protected under these laws to support the provision of care without risk (WHO, 2023).

CAPN is committed to working with other national and international organisations, as well as global health leaders to support children and families and to advocate peace for all. Protecting the world's children and youth, and advocating for their health and wellbeing, is always an investment in our collective future. Every effort must be made to end ongoing conflicts, cultivate and improve health access to those affected, and work together to advocate for the rebuilding and repair of infrastructure necessary for healthy children and families around the world. No matter the humanitarian crisis, we seek to focus not on the conflict itself, but on the consequences for children and youth, and the continued need to advocate on their behalf for solutions which will allow them to grow, develop, and live in safety.

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