

Response to ‘An open letter: In solidarity with all children suffering in wars; to all who hold or share a concern for the wellbeing of children’

To the Editor: We wish to express our concern about the March 2025 letter^[1] by Van As, Sidler, Allema, *et al.* titled ‘In solidarity with all children suffering in wars; to all who hold or share a concern for the wellbeing of children’. Despite its title emphasising a broad concern for all children, the authors’ focus on only Gaza reveals their biases and intent.

While we recognise the authors’ attempt to empathise with Jewish Holocaust trauma, their attempt to utilise the Shoah to psychoanalyse Jewish national identity is quite alarming. Such reasoning, by individuals who seem not to be mental health practitioners, pathologises Jewish historical suffering, distorts clinical concepts such as trauma and abuse cycles, and serves to politically delegitimise an entire nation. The statement that the Holocaust damaged Jewish national identity is antisemitic and would never be tolerated if made about any other ethnicity. Casting Jewish survivors of the Holocaust as perpetrators of genocide is a trope that echoes antisemitic libels that have no place in professional or academic discourse. In this tendentious accusation, the authors are guilty of Holocaust inversion.

Without evidence, the authors label Israel’s response a ‘modern-day genocide’, a term with specific legal meaning and one without any ruling or determination from an international judicial body. The International Court of Justice did not conclude that Israel had committed genocide.^[2] Using such unsubstantiated language in a medical journal is reckless and degrades the seriousness of the term. Their charge is replete with the usual specious accusations of withholding humanitarian aid and deliberately targeting children. They fail to mention the Israeli children murdered, orphaned and abducted by Hamas. They are also silent about the use by Hamas of civilians and civilian infrastructure as human shields, and the tragic prolongation of the war as a result of Hamas’ refusal to give up hostages and lay down arms.

The authors use their medical authority to call for academic boycotts and the termination of institutional partnerships, under the banner of humanitarian concern. Their enhanced call for boycotts against institutions that do not share their political position contradicts fundamental principles of academic freedom, dialogue and open exchange.

We agree with the authors that protecting children in conflicts is a moral and professional duty. However, such advocacy must be impartial and ethically consistent. Singling out Israel, downplaying the context of Hamas’ violence and calling for academic exclusion is not based in a concern for all children. It reflects bias.

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On behalf of:

American Jewish Medical Association
Australasian Jewish Medical Federation
Association des Médecins Juifs du Québec
Doctors against Racism and Antisemitism (Canada)
Global Jewish Health Alliance
South African Association of Jewish Mental Health and Allied Practitioners
Associação Médica Brasil-Israel

1. Van As AB, Sidler D, Allema JH, et al. An open letter: In solidarity with all children suffering in wars; to all who hold or share a concern for the wellbeing of children. *S Afr Med J* 2025;115(2):93-94. <https://doi.org/10.7196/SAMJ.2025.v115i2.3044> <https://samajournals.co.za/index.php/samj/article/view/3044/1257>
2. Casciani D. What did the ICJ ruling mean in South Africa’s genocide case against Israel? BBC, 17 May 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3g9g63jl17o> (accessed 16 January 2025).