

# ISRAEL

## Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2023



**SAFEGUARDING  
HEALTH  
IN CONFLICT**



**Insecurity  
Insight**  
Data on People in Danger

# Letter from the Chair



The year 2023 was a grim one for violence inflicted on health care. In 2022, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition identified the highest number of incidents since we began reporting. Yet in 2023 the number was 25% greater, exceeding 2,500.

The intensity of conflicts characterized by pervasive attacks on health care in recent years declined somewhat in 2023, including in Syria, Yemen, and the Tigray region of Ethiopia. As a result, it might also have been expected that the global trend of violence against health care would turn downward. Instead, from the first days of two new and catastrophic wars, one in Sudan and the other between Israel and Hamas, health care came under ferocious assault. In both conflicts warring parties killed health workers, attacked facilities, and destroyed health care systems. Meanwhile, attacks on health care in Myanmar and Ukraine continued at a relentless pace, in each case exceeding 1,000 since the start of the conflicts in 2021 and 2022, respectively. In many chronic conflicts, fighting forces continued to kidnap and kill health workers and loot health facilities.

At the same time, new and disturbing trends emerged. In Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Gaza, Lebanon, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen combatants employed drones to attack health clinics, hospitals, and ambulances. In many conflicts, combatants violently entered hospitals or occupied them as sites from which to conduct military operations, leading to injuries to and the deaths of patients and staff. In many conflicts, the conduct of combatants revealed open contempt for their duty to protect civilians and health care under international humanitarian law (IHL). Israel, while purporting to abide by IHL, promoted a view of its obligations that, if accepted, would undermine the fundamental protections that IHL puts in place for civilians and health care in war.

The one consistent feature of the attacks was continued impunity for these crimes. For more than a decade, despite their repeated commitments, governments have failed to follow through on these commitments and reform their military practices, cease arms transfers to perpetrators, and bring those responsible for crimes to justice.

We need a new approach, starting with stronger leadership from UN agencies and governments willing to join with civil society and the health care community to take far more assertive action to end the scourge of violence against health care. Among other steps, they can press prosecutors domestically and internationally to bring cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against health care, to develop political support for special tribunals to circumvent UN Security Council members' vetoes of referrals to the International Criminal Court, and restrict the sale of arms to forces that commit crimes.

There are some sources of hope. After years of lassitude, the World Health Organization has spoken forcefully against vicious assaults on health facilities and health workers. Civil society groups are exerting pressure to stop arms transfers to perpetrators of violence, while some militaries have launched initiatives to reduce civilian casualties in war. Leaders must build on these initiatives. Ending the suffering of millions of people depends on their doing so.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Len Rubenstein". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Len Rubenstein  
*Chair, Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition*

[↓ Executive Summary](#) | [Full Report](#) | [Recommendations](#) | [Methodology](#) | [Data](#)



## REPORTED INCIDENTS AND MOST COMMONLY REPORTED CONCERNS



**33**

REPORTED INCIDENTS



**22**

HEALTH WORKERS KILLED

↓ Source: 2023 SHCC Health Care Israel Data

## OVERVIEW

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 33 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Israel in 2023. In these incidents, at least 22 health workers were killed. This factsheet is based on the dataset [2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data](#), which is available for download on the [Humanitarian Data Exchange \(HDX\)](#).

## THE CONTEXT

On the morning of October 7, 2023, Hamas fighters, together with various other armed groups and armed individuals from Gaza, crossed into Israel and attacked “kibbutzim” communities and army bases along Israel’s southern border with the Gaza Strip. The attack lasted many hours and included the forced entry into homes, community buildings, and shelters and the deliberate killing of almost 1,200 women, children, and men, most of whom were civilians. The fighters kidnapped more than 240 people and took them as hostages into Gaza. Israelis living in southern Israel close to the Gaza Strip were used to sirens warning of attacks and rocket fire from Palestinian armed groups in Gaza; however, the Israeli authorities were caught off guard by the scale of the October 7 attack, and survivors spent hours without water, electricity, or food while in hiding.

The Supernova Sukkot Gathering in Re’im district (an open-air music festival) and Kibbutz Be’eri close to the festival’s location were most affected, with 364 festival goers and about 100 kibbutz residents being killed. In response to the attack, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched Operation Swords of Iron involving intense aerial bombing campaigns and ground operations in the Gaza Strip, which is covered in the section on the occupied Palestinian territories in this report.

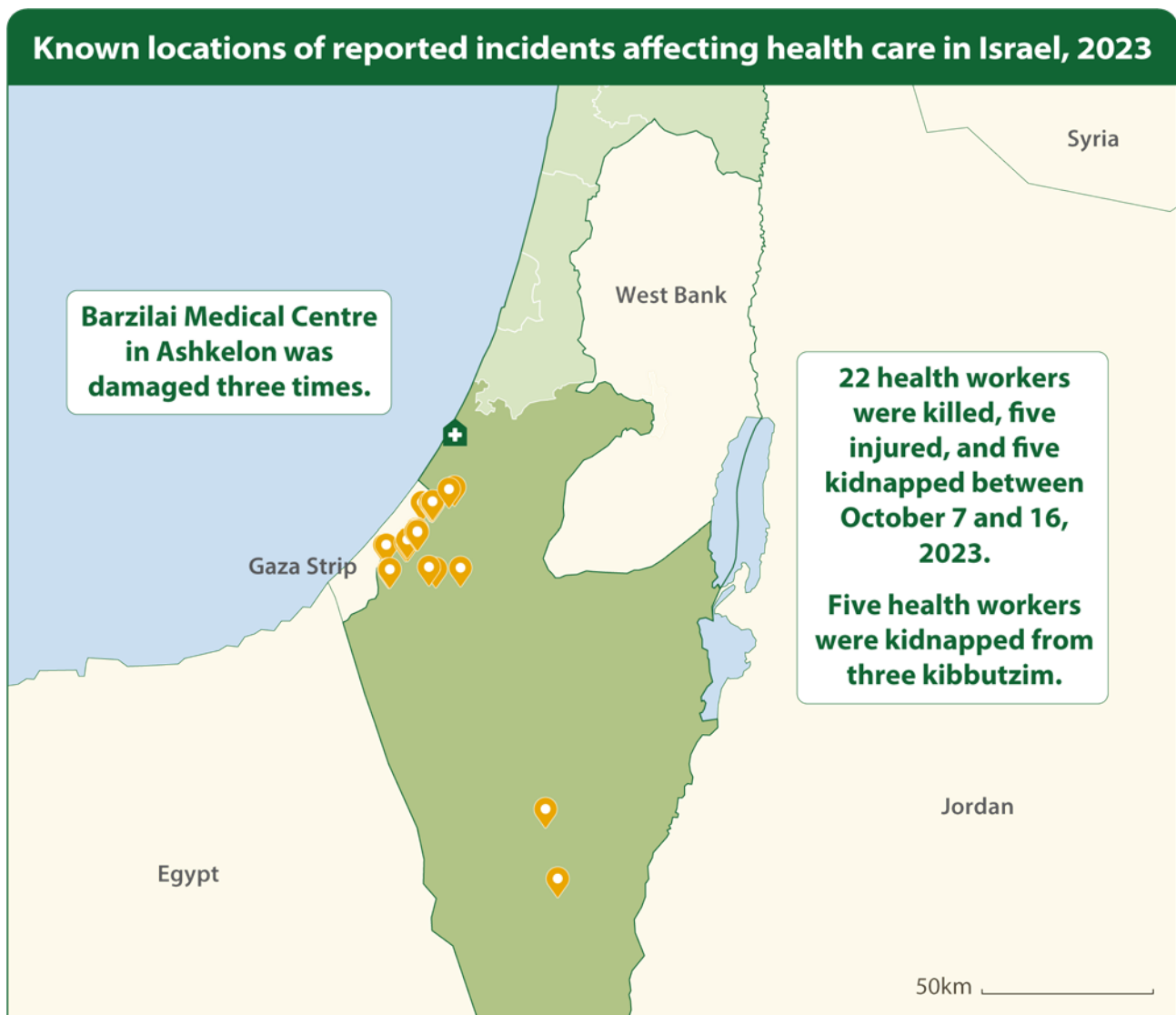
## VIOLENCE AGAINST OR OBSTRUCTION OF HEALTH CARE IN 2023

Incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care were spread over three Israeli districts, with the majority taking place in the South district and one each in Negev and Re’im. Most incidents affected Magen David Adom (MDA, Israel’s emergency, medical, and disaster service equivalent to the Red Cross) staff



members/volunteers, with one reported incident directly affecting an INGO and two incidents affecting private health care organizations.

The majority of cases involved health workers being shot at, while five reports of explosive weapons use were recorded in the South district. A missile strike injured an Indian nurse; rockets hit and damaged Barzilai Medical Center in the southern city of Ashkelon on three occasions, including a maternity ward; and a male local NGO volunteer was killed by shrapnel from an Israeli tank shell that hit the house where he, his wife, and 12 other hostages were being held.<sup>1</sup> Two female and one male MDA volunteers were killed separately while actively fighting Hamas militants as part of Operation Swords of Iron.<sup>2</sup>



## Health workers killed, injured, and kidnapped

In total, 22 health workers were killed, five injured, and five kidnapped between October 7 and 16, 2023. Eighteen were male and 13 female.<sup>3</sup> At least 22 health workers, including volunteer paramedics, a nurse, a Peruvian-Israeli doctor, and a Canadian medic, were killed in 21 incidents. A female international NGO health worker was kidnapped and five other health workers were killed in the attack on Kibbutz Be’eri in



the South district. Four were killed while providing care to injured people, including a medic and a doctor who were shot and killed inside a clinic.<sup>4</sup> Two male health workers were killed while providing medical care to people injured in the Supernova Sukkot Gathering/Re'im music festival attack, including a former Canadian-Israeli military medic and an off-duty paramedic who was shot and killed by Hamas while he was bandaging a wounded person.<sup>5</sup> After he was killed, his ambulance was taken and driven into the Gaza Strip.<sup>6</sup> Another paramedic was shot and killed as he was traveling in an ambulance to Ofakim town, South district, to treat injured people.<sup>7</sup>

At least five health workers were kidnapped from three kibbutzim. Three out of the five were employed by the charity group Road to Recovery. A former INGO staff member and an MDA volunteer paramedic who was abducted together with his wife and two daughters from Kibbutz Nachal were taken into the Gaza Strip.<sup>8</sup> On November 27, his wife and daughters were released as part of a temporary ceasefire deal. On December 1, Israeli forces confirmed his death while in captivity.<sup>9</sup> A husband and wife who were both Road to Recovery volunteers were kidnapped by Hamas fighters.<sup>10</sup> The wife was released on October 23, 2023.<sup>11</sup> Another Road to Recovery volunteer was kidnapped and later appeared in a Hamas video.<sup>12</sup> The fates of the remaining staff were not recorded.

## THE IMPACT OF ATTACKS ON HEALTH CARE

---

Throughout October, thousands of rockets and mortars were fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israel's Iron Dome air defense system intercepted approximately 2,000 rockets, while others landed in open areas or struck civilian sites. Consequently, due to the persistent threat of rocket fire, two medical centers in southern Israel that treated most casualties during the first days of the conflict were forced to relocate some of their wards to more sheltered areas or to underground complexes. These medical centers, along with a third in Ashdod, provided health care to people in southern Israel. In Tel Aviv, a medical center moved one of its departments to its emergency underground facility as a precaution against potential missile attacks from Iran.<sup>13</sup>

Following the October 7 attacks, there has been a surge in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety in Israel, with one in three Israelis reporting symptoms of PTSD. According to the IDF, in the first four weeks after the October 7 attacks there was an increase in soldiers and reservists seeking assistance from the IDF mental health hotline, which was set up immediately at the start of the conflict. Front line and emergency workers who attended to the victims of the attacks and who themselves or their families were personally affected by the attacks could be at a heightened risk of developing symptoms of PTSD.

Some communities near the Gaza Strip had developed friendly relations with individuals from Gaza, some of whom worked in their kibbutzim. Road to Recovery frequently drove Palestinians needing medical care from the Erez border crossing with Gaza to receive treatment at Israeli hospitals. During the October 7 attacks, four of the charities' volunteers were killed and three were taken hostage into Gaza. Although some members of the group have expressed their intention to continue their work and their work has continued in the West Bank, others have stopped or decided to focus on other aid activities inside Israel. Donations to the charity group have also reportedly slowed, with direct consequences for patients.



- 1 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 40982; 40978; 44760; 44761; 45130.
- 2 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 41594; 41599; 41593.
- 3 The gender of one staff member was not recorded.
- 4 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 41576.
- 5 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 43878; 41578.
- 6 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 41578.
- 7 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 40979.
- 8 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 44680.
- 9 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 44680.
- 10 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 45131.
- 11 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 45131.
- 12 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 45132.
- 13 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 ISR SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 41126.

# SAFEGUARDING HEALTH IN CONFLICT

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition is a group of more than 40 organizations working to protect health workers and services threatened by war or civil unrest. We have raised awareness of global attacks on health and pressed United Nations agencies for greater global action to protect the security of health care. We monitor attacks, strengthen universal norms of respect for the right to health, and demand accountability for perpetrators.

[www.safeguardinghealth.org](http://www.safeguardinghealth.org)

Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition  
615 N. Wolfe Street, E7143, Baltimore, MD 21205  
SHCC administrator, [safeguardinghcc@gmail.com](mailto:safeguardinghcc@gmail.com)