

## **DO NO HARM: statement from the UK-Palestine Mental Health Network**

**From:** [Lara Sheehi](#)

**Sent:** Saturday, May 22, 2021 8:53 PM

**To:** [Lara Sheehi](#)

**Subject:** DO NO HARM: statement from the UK-Palestine Mental Health Network

Hi everyone,

I haven't seen anything on this listserv regarding the real-time ethnic cleansing and the unfolding policies of settler colonialism toward indigenous folks happening in Palestine right now.

I can't say I'm shocked, though I know many folks who I have spoken to directly do care about the rights of Palestinians and advocate for them in spaces we might share elsewhere. I understand this silence in the context of the often-time PEP (Progressive Except Palestine--it's an actual thing) position of our entire field, let alone the very real backlash one might receive in the USA (some states even outlaw any statement).

That said, I thought the below statement was important to pass along, especially with a growing movement and call (emanating from Palestine and Palestinians) for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) as a means to communicate the gravity of the various chokeholds that are constitutive of apartheid. Just like in the boycott Apartheid South Africa movement, I'm full-heartedly convinced that clinicians belong in this fight and have a lot to offer to the analysis and to the reasons why speaking up against systemic oppression is an ethical imperative.

Please circulate to any other listservs.

### **DO NO HARM: Refrain from Locating your Conferences in Israel**

**A call to all mental health organizations from the USA, UK, Ireland, France and South Africa in solidarity with the Palestinian people:**

We call on you, our colleagues in the field of mental health, to join us in taking a "don't go, don't support" position in regard to international mental health-related events held in Israel, or external events sponsored by, or in collaboration with, Israeli organizations. We believe we must do so in order to honor our primary professional obligation to **do no harm**.

While there is strong commitment in our field to encourage dialogue across divides, we also know that we must ensure that our interventions do not replicate or reinforce abusive relationships. Such an extreme asymmetry of power exists in Israel/Palestine that we must take special care not to inadvertently support an oppressive environment that is inimical to ordinary life and to psychological well-being.

The Israeli Government uses coercive force in a violent and illegal process designed—at the very least—to ghettoise and marginalize the indigenous population on the basis of their ethnicity. To disregard the profound and enduring physical and psychological damage that results would be inconsistent with our professional ethics which include a commitment to justice,

inclusivity, reciprocity and anti-racism. To turn a blind eye to Israel's human rights abuses inflicts further injury on the Palestinian people, including mental health professionals, routinely exposed to the systemic violence of the regime.

The Israeli human rights organization, B'Tselem, as well as mainstream organizations like Human Rights Watch, have now concluded that Israel has created an illegal apartheid state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. The same moral imperatives that required the stand taken by people of conscience against Apartheid South Africa apply again.

Both Palestinian civil society as a whole and our colleagues in the mental health field have called on us to honor a policy of non-engagement with Israeli institutions and organizations. This call, *which does not apply to individuals*, has been supported by a number of Jewish Israeli colleagues. A collective response from us, declining to participate in any proposed event, will send a powerful message that collusion with Israel's systemic dispossession of and discrimination towards Palestinians contravenes our professional ethics urging us to support the struggle for human rights.

This is an appeal to join a form of nonviolent resistance, made with clear objectives in mind. Implicit in the struggle for racial justice and equality is an end to the many specific policies that routinely inflict psychological harm on the Palestinians. These include the siege of Gaza and the de-development of the Palestinian economy; shoot-to-kill policies and the deliberate maiming of civilians; imprisonment without trial and the use of torture; the night-time arrests, abusive interrogation and incarceration of children; the kidnapping of the bodies of Palestinians killed by the armed forces; unrestrained settler violence; the demolition of Palestinian homes and villages, the appropriation of their lands and the periodic aggressive military assaults on the besieged and vulnerable civilian population of Gaza.

We therefore urge that your association reflect carefully on the obligations enshrined in its ethical codes of practice prior to committing to events, 'live' or 'virtual', that involve cooperation with Israeli institutions. Should such a possibility arise, we trust you will first consult with the Palestinian mental health community. We would be pleased to arrange the necessary introductions. Consistent with this, we urge mental health organizations to review their financial affairs—including the location of investments and the nature of their donations to lobbyists, political action committees, and political candidates—to ensure that they are not unwittingly investing in, or profiting from state crimes, the consequences of which are directly contrary to our core purposes as mental health professionals.

Many colleagues have committed themselves to "do no harm" by adding their names to the **Mental Health Workers' Pledge for Palestine**. We invite you and your members to join them [here](#). Further information about professional solidarity with Palestine can be found at [www.usapalmhn.org](http://www.usapalmhn.org) and [www.ukpalmhn.com](http://www.ukpalmhn.com)

Sincerely,

Steering Committee, The USA Palestine Mental Health Network  
Steering Group, The UK Palestine Mental Health Network  
Steering Group, The Ireland Palestine Mental Health Network  
Steering Committee, The France Palestine Mental Health Network  
Steering Committee, The South Africa Palestine Mental Health Network

May 21, 2021