



Why are Hospitals Bombed?

Hastaneler Neden Bombalanıyor?

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Dear Editor,

International humanitarian law explicitly mandates the protection of hospitals, ambulances, and health-care workers; according to the ICRC, medical units and medical personnel must be respected and protected in all circumstances.^[1] Violations of these rules may, in many cases, constitute war crimes.^[2]

At this stage of human history, shaped by thousands of years of painful experience, these rules are once again being violated. In Gaza, according to the World Health Organization situation report dated Jan 31, 2026, more than 930 attacks on health care had been documented since October 2023. The same report stated that all 36 hospitals had been damaged, that only half remained partially functional, and that there were no functional hospitals left in North Gaza. It also reported that 51% of essential medicines were out of stock.^[3] The UN Human Rights Office further reported that repeated deadly attacks on and around hospitals in Gaza had pushed the health system to the “brink of total collapse.”^[2]

A similar picture has emerged in Iran. WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office stated that, since Feb 28, 2026, 14 attacks on health care had been recorded in Iran, and that 4 health workers had been killed in these attacks.^[4]

These are not only the shame of the present day; they are the latest links in a long historical chain. During the 1935–36 invasion of Ethiopia, around 20 Red Cross and Red Crescent field hos-

pitals under Geneva protection were bombed.^[5] In Sri Lanka, hospitals in the Vanni region were repeatedly shelled in 2009, which Human Rights Watch described as possible evidence of war crimes.^[6] In Syria, systematic attacks on health facilities have been documented for years.^[7] In Kunduz, on Oct 3, 2015, a US airstrike on the MSF trauma hospital killed 42 people.^[8]

To strike a health facility is to strike the hopes and protections of civilians who have no part in war; it is to take away the right to life of a child yet to be born. It is also to attack the doctor and the nurse who carry the ethical obligation to provide care even to a wounded war criminal who may have attacked them.

That many of the major destructions of the past century were carried out directly by Western powers, or under their political and military support, stands in stark contradiction to their claims regarding civilization, law, and human rights.^[8,9] The question of why hospitals are bombed should now be directed not only at the perpetrators but also at those who had the power to prevent such attacks and failed to do so. Although many articles and letters have already been published on this issue, we believe it remains important to continue writing such texts so that attacks on health facilities and health-care workers are not normalized, and so that it is clearly recorded that such violence is unacceptable. Sustained public and academic objection remains an ethical necessity against the normalization of these violations.

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