

Mr. António Guterres  
Secretary-General  
United Nations  
405 East 42nd Street  
New York, NY 10017,  
United States of America

04 September 2025

Dear Secretary-General Guterres,

As the newly elected President of the International Council of Nurses (ICN), representing the world's 30 million nurses, I am writing to you today to express support for your leadership in working to end attacks on health care and humanitarian deprivation in conflict zones, including through the UN's recently relaunched #ActForHumanity campaign. ICN stands ready to work with the UN to defend human rights and safeguard the right to health around the world.

I also write to express our grave concern that both attacks and denial of aid have intensified and to urge you to take immediate action to protect the nurses, health workers, and populations who are enduring horrific violence and starvation.

My predecessor, Dr Pamela Cipriano, wrote to you last year with a call for the UN to use the fullness of its powers to end the systematic targeting of health workers and hospitals which directly contravene international humanitarian law (IHL); to urge a ceasefire in the Israel-Palestine war, including the return of all hostages; and to ensure increased humanitarian aid and support for health systems in Gaza. We remain alarmed that since Dr Cipriano's letter, violence against health care has escalated while humanitarian conditions have drastically deteriorated.

We have witnessed several recent devastating attacks on hospitals, including the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, Gaza, where at least 20 people died, including healthcare workers and journalists, as well as deadly strikes in Ukraine which have targeted medical facilities. Food distribution centres have become sites of attacks, with mass casualties and deaths reported. Famine in Gaza has now been officially

confirmed, affecting over 500,000 people, with 320,000 children at immediate risk of death. You have rightly described this as “a failure of humanity itself”.

At ICN’s recent Congress in Helsinki, our governing body passed an emergency resolution strongly condemning these continued and increasing attacks; calling for all parties to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect health personnel, patients, and facilities; and calling on the international community to ensure accountability for violations and uphold the protection of health care in conflict zones.

This systematic targeting of health care and of civilians, which is illegal under IHL, cannot continue. ICN is gravely concerned that illegal attacks on health care have become normalized and legitimized in warfare, and we repeat our calls for the international community to take urgent action to end impunity and enforce IHL, including accountability for its violations.

ICN is in constant contact with National Nursing Associations (NNAs) in all conflict-affected regions. Our nursing colleagues in war zones tell us of the horrific impact of these continued attacks, which jeopardize the lives and safety of health workers and deprive entire populations of care, as well as of the deep trauma of treating the victims of attacks and starvation, often women, children, and the elderly.

ICN works to advocate for peace and humanitarian aid throughout the world, including through our #NursesforPeace campaign, Humanitarian Fund, and partnership with Direct Relief. We support the UN’s efforts to bring about a lasting peace, and ICN will be present at the upcoming UN General Assembly (UNGA) representing the world’s nurses and bringing the nursing voice to a wide range of important discussions including non-communicable diseases (NCDs), mental health, and humanitarian work, as well as hosting a side event to unite nurse leaders to achieve our global health goals.

Secretary-General Guterres, you will soon open the 80<sup>th</sup> session of UNGA and mark the International Day of Peace commemorating the founding of the UN. I urge you to utilize the full powers of your office to repeat and intensify your calls for all parties in conflict to urgently end attacks on health care, respect international humanitarian law, protect humanitarian aid and human rights, and commit to a permanent ceasefire. As the UN celebrates its 80th anniversary, we stand with you

in working to ensure that its founding ideals of peace, dignity, and human rights prevail over the devastating threats to civilians and health workers we are witnessing worldwide.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person. Please let me know if we can arrange a meeting to discuss these urgent issues and how we can best continue to collaborate with the UN to support the world's nurses in bring healing and hope to all.

Yours sincerely,

Dr José Luis Cobos Serrano

President

International Council of Nurses