

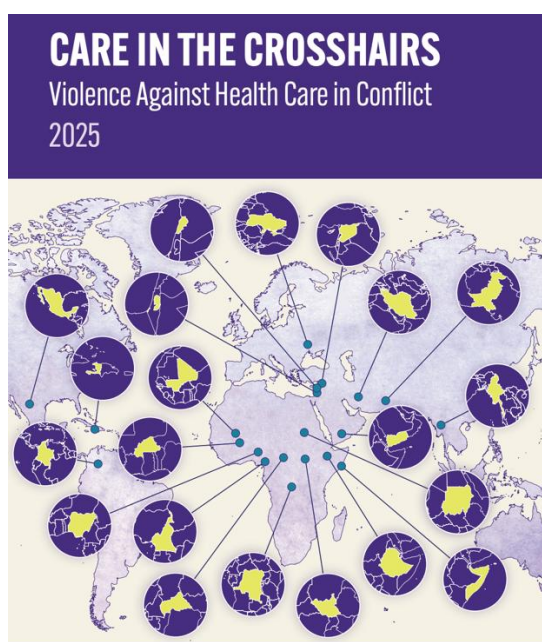
ICN intensifies advocacy to protect nurses in conflict and promote the power of peace

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is intensifying its advocacy on the protection of nurses and health workers in conflict, the normalization of attacks on health care, and the essential role of nursing in building peace. ICN has been bringing these urgent messages to the highest global forums and demanding concrete action to end violence and impunity.

Recently, ICN has:

- **Condemned recent gravely alarming data on attacks on health care in the latest Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) report:** ICN contributed to the report through its role on the Steering Committee as a founding SHCC member.
- **Put nursing and peace at the centre of the profession's agenda** with a powerful keynote address opening the Swiss Nursing Congress.
Provided strong input, including firsthand nursing testimony from conflict-affected countries, for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights report on the human rights of women and children in conflict and post-conflict situations.
- **Continued ongoing #NursesforPeace humanitarian work and advocacy** in 10+ countries, and promoted the **Power of Peace** as a fundamental pillar of International Nurses Day 2026.
- **Brought strong messages to the 79th World Health Assembly (WHA79) in Geneva**, with formal interventions and ICN's President, First Vice President and CEO making strong calls for an end to attacks on health care, full accountability, and protection and empowerment for the courageous nurses who risk their lives to bring hope and healing in conflict, recovery, and rebuilding.

1. ICN condemns normalization of attacks and violations of nursing neutrality documented in devastating Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition report



The publication on 28 May of the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition's annual report, [Care in the Crosshairs](#), confirms ICN's long-standing and urgent warnings that the catastrophic normalization of attacks on health care is driving ever-escalating violence and impunity. The report documents 2,546 horrific attacks on health care across 33 countries and territories in 2025, including 455 health workers killed, 218 kidnapped, 263 arrested or detained, and 790 incidents of damage or destruction of health facilities. The report also reveals dangerous escalations in the methods, scale and nature of violence directed at health care, including surges in drone-related attacks and state-actor-driven violence. ICN deplores the unacceptable and unconscionable targeting of health personnel and is particularly alarmed by the scale of kidnappings (which have increased) as well as arrests/detentions, which can subject health workers to torture, prolonged psychological harm, and violence, and which often punish health workers for upholding their ethical duty to provide impartial care to all. These figures come on top of [already devastating trends](#): annual incidents of attacks on health care have increased more than eightfold between 2016 and 2024, with over 18,000 attacks recorded across 51 countries and over 3,800 health workers killed: the number of health workers killed in conflict have risen fivefold in less than a decade. ICN is a founding member of SHCC and ICN Senior Policy Adviser Hoi Shan Fokeladeh contributed to the report on the Steering Committee.

ICN President José Luis Cobos Serrano said:

"The devastating figures in the SHCC report confirm exactly what ICN has been warning about for years: the catastrophic normalization of attacks on health care in conflict is driving ever-escalating violence and impunity.

"The report documents heartbreaking and unacceptable violence, with nurses and health workers being tragically killed, kidnapped, arrested, intimidated, and subjected to sexual violence, and an alarming increase in drone and state-actor attacks. ICN is in constant contact with National Nursing Associations in conflict-affected regions and we are continually hearing firsthand and harrowing accounts of nurses who go to work to save lives and never come home, of the immense psychological toll of working under bombardment and witnessing atrocities, of nurses losing colleagues and seeing health facilities destroyed around them.



"No nurse should ever be a target. ICN will continue to stand with nurses in conflict through our #NursesforPeace initiative and advocacy. We will not stop calling for the attacks to end, for full accountability, and for every nurse, health worker, and patient to be protected."

2. Swiss Nursing Congress keynote: "Nurses and their ethics are a critical solution the world needs"

#NursesforPeace was chosen as the keynote topic of the Swiss Nursing Congress, reflecting the centrality of peace and the protection of health workers to the profession globally. ICN CEO Howard Catton delivered the keynote speech, condemning devastating attacks, including strikes in Lebanon and Ukraine in recent days. He condemned the catastrophic normalization of violence against health care and lack of accountability, which ICN has continually demanded action on. The speech also demonstrated "an unashamedly positive message": that nurses and their ethics are a powerful force for peace that the world urgently needs.



Mr Catton said:

"Peace is more than the absence of war – it requires the active protection of rights, social justice, and equality, and that is precisely what nurses bring as peacemakers and human rights defenders. The [ICN Code of Ethics](#) is clear: nurses have a fundamental responsibility to provide care to all people in need, regardless of the setting. Upholding these principles when conflict is raging requires extraordinary courage, and at great personal risk, in every conflict, nurses bring hope and healing. Yet we are seeing nursing neutrality violated, with nurses and health workers punished, kidnapped, or arrested for doing exactly what their ethical duty demands – in some cases perceived as supporting the 'enemy' when they are simply providing impartial care to all. The scale of attacks, kidnappings, and arrests represents a deeply worrying escalation designed to militarize health care and sow fear. This must end now. We cannot allow nurses to lose their lives, face pressure and violence, or be detained or arrested for providing care.

'This year marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2286, which reaffirmed obligations under International Humanitarian Law to respect and protect health personnel, patients, facilities, and medical transport. A decade later, the world is failing catastrophically to meet these obligations. Every violation of IHL is an attack on humanity itself. When nurses are killed, kidnapped, or detained, when hospitals are destroyed, entire communities lose access to life-saving care.

'We need to stand with, support, and invest in nurses – because that is how we move from singing to 'give peace a chance' to actually delivering it.'

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3. Firsthand testimony from nurses in conflict: ICN submission to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

As part of ICN's work to make the voices of nurses on the frontlines of conflict heard at the highest levels, in May 2026, ICN submitted [a comprehensive input to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR) on the promotion and protection of the human rights of women and children in conflict and post-conflict situations. The submission drew directly on firsthand evidence from consultations ICN conducted with National Nursing Associations in several of the world's most severely conflict-affected countries, who provided firsthand nursing testimony of systematic violations of International Humanitarian Law with devastating and disproportionate consequences for the majority-female nursing workforce and for the women and children they serve. It highlighted that when nurses and health care are attacked, it is disproportionately a women's workforce that is harmed and disproportionately women and children who lose access to essential care. ICN's submission called urgently for the enforcement of IHL protections for all nurses and health workers; full accountability for violations; the recognition of nurses as frontline protectors of women's and children's rights; and the meaningful inclusion of nursing voices in reparation and recovery processes.

The submission also referenced ICN's [previous input to reports by the UN Special Rapporteur](#) for the Right to Health, including her report to the Human Rights Council, "Health and care workers: the oath takers and defenders of the right to health" which [recognized](#) ICN's #NursesforPeace campaign.

4. WHA79: Strong messages on protecting nurses and global health security

At the 79th World Health Assembly (WHA79), which took place in Geneva from 18–23 May, ICN delivered sustained and powerful messages on the protection of health workers in conflict, the need for accountability, and the imperative to invest in nurses as the foundation of health system resilience and global health security.

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, in his WHA79 opening remarks, described attacks on health care as the "alarming and illegal new normal in conflict" – directly echoing the urgent warnings ICN has been raising for several years.

Both ICN President José Luis Cobos Serrano and ICN First Vice President Sineva Ribeiro had the opportunity to speak directly with Dr Tedros during WHA79, and they conveyed in the strongest terms the urgent need to act in defence of nurses and all health workers in conflict zones, insisting that immediate action is required to end the violence and impunity.



ICN President José Luis Cobos Serrano delivered powerful remarks at the Global Health and Peace Initiative (GHPI) side event at WHA79, reinforcing ICN's message that peace and health are inseparable, and that investing in nurses – the largest and most trusted health profession, close to communities – is fundamental to strengthening health systems and creating the conditions for lasting peace.



ICN delivered a formal [intervention](#) as part of the WHA agenda on health emergencies, highlighting the impact of ongoing conflict on nurses and health personnel, and urging all

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states and parties to armed conflict to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law and protect health personnel, patients, and health care facilities.

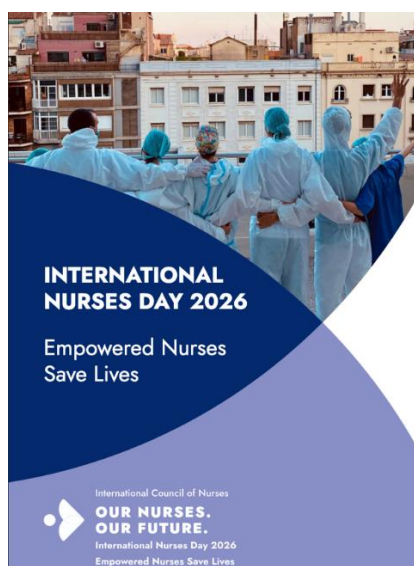
Throughout the week, ICN also raised alarm about failures to protect health workers in public health emergencies and called for action, including issuing [a statement on the devastating Ebola outbreaks](#) in DRC and Uganda, where nurses are being put at risk and fearful for their safety due to lack of PPE and support.

5. #NursesforPeace and The Power of Peace

Through the [#NursesforPeace initiative](#), ICN's Humanitarian Fund, and its strategic partnership with Direct Relief, ICN continues to deliver practical support and solidarity to nurses in 10+ conflict-affected countries – through emergency financial support, training, equipment, supplies, and leadership development and training, as well as by amplifying the voices of nurses in conflict and engaging in high-level advocacy.

A new #NursesforPeace update is coming soon – meanwhile, read the latest update [here](#).

This year's International Nurses Day report, [Our Nurses. Our Future. Empowered Nurses Save Lives](#), presents a new model of seven transformative nursing powers, including the Power of Peace. The report presents evidence and case studies showing how nurses protect the right to health, provide hope as well as healing, and support both crisis response and recovery and rebuilding in conflicts. It also demonstrates that nurses protect global health security by identifying and treating infectious disease risks in the fragile settings where 80% of major epidemics occur.



The infographic is titled 'THE POWER OF PEACE' and is numbered '7'. It features a blue dove icon. The text states: 'In conflict and humanitarian crises, nurses' care defends health, human rights, and peace. Nurses in conflict settings protect global health security by identifying and treating infectious disease risks: 80% of major infectious disease epidemics occur in fragile or conflict-affected countries.' To the right, there is a graphic of three colorful virus particles and the text: '80% of major infectious disease epidemics occur in fragile or conflict-affected countries'.

Learn more about ICN's #NursesforPeace campaign and support our photo call, "I'm a global nurse and I support NursesforPeace" [here](#).

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