



Workshop Report

On May 25, 2024, in Geneva, the Geneva Global Health Hub (G2H2) convened a civil society workshop ahead of the 77th session of the World Health Assembly (WHA77). The workshop aimed to provide a space for common reflection and exchange on the escalating violence and humanitarian crises mounting globally, with a particular focus on conflicts in the Middle East, Sudan and Ukraine.

The workshop commenced with a stark reminder: the alarming surge in global organized violence soon after the Covid-19 pandemic, exacerbated by the most recent fires of wars, including genocidal conflicts, is not merely a statistical anomaly, but a disturbing trend deriving from systemic disregard for humanitarian principles and international law, coupled with increased militarization and frontal polarization in the international community's interplay.

This harsh reality significantly impacts civil society organizations (CSOs) working on the field, who witness the humanitarian toll and are confronted with the constantly unpunished breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL). But it also affects the CSOs operating in the political arena of global public health, since their activities are potently harmed by the radicalization of injustices historically enshrined in classical dynamics of international geopolitics, including the obfuscation of international law and sovereignty. While provoking mass casualties and colossal waves of migrations, this reality contributes to normalizing warfare in the political discourse and to weaponizing the unregulated economy.

The war on Gaza and increasingly bloody repression in the West Bank exemplifies the critical need for CSOs to reassess their roles in advocating for peace and justice. This ongoing conflict, reflecting decades of occupation and systematic human rights violations, highlights the limitations of international law, which ultimately relies on the will of states for enforcement. It also underscores the ferocity that is tolerated in the name of historical narratives that justify violations of justice and peace.



We live in a normalized state of exception, where CSOs are increasingly silenced and targeted when providing humanitarian assistance. Hospitals have become battlegrounds, health personnel are targeted, and women and children are specific targets. As emphasized by **Christos Christou**, the international president of Médecins Sans Frontières, there is an essential need for CSOs to exercise humanitarian resistance and solidarity in conflict zones, despite these unprecedented risks and violations of all sorts. He highlighted that the indispensable humanitarian efforts carry an intrinsic political meaning, insofar as they can challenge militarized narratives justifying violence and oppression. This is why it is important to work for a unified CSO stance against these narratives, embracing humanitarian and political stances, based on international law.

The discussion moved to the critical role of solidarity movements in advocating for marginalized communities, whose sufferings are hardly featured in the public sphere. Speaking about the Lebanese context where he operates, **Mohammed Al-Zayed**, the health coordinator of AMEL, for instance, echoed the frustrations at the failure of existing frameworks to prevent human rights violations, highlighting how Lebanon has been suffering for the past 70 years from conflicts and impunity.



"We are the only health facility in the region, we serve 17 villages, people who are staying are those who cannot afford to leave because they have no place to go to. We are speaking of refugees, elderly and the most vulnerable people. If we close the center and leave, what message are we sending them?"

- Fadia Nasser

Fadia is a registered nurse. For the past 23 years she has been the director of Amel Arkoub center, less than 4 Km from the Lebanese-Palestinian border. After the clashes erupted in South Lebanon on Oct 8th 2024, Fadia moved her family to Beirut. She left her village in Kfarshuba after her brother's house was burnt by an Israeli artillery shell. Since then, she has moved again to stay closer to the center.

Throughout the workshop, participants engaged further in dynamic discussions on the palpable impotence of international law, and the shortcomings of international institutions in upholding human rights and IHL. The debate also highlighted the responsibilities of CSOs, both for those working in conflicts and for those advocating for the right to health. A strong consensus emerged on the need for solidarity across civil society, advocating for a unified approach to promote global justice and peace.

Key speakers shared their perspectives in the afternoon, linking diverse issues under the theme of systemic injustice:

- **Yurii Sheliashenko**, the leader of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, emphasized the mental and physical trauma of war in his country. He highlighted the price for those who embody civil disobedience as a potent tool against any oppressive military logic, challenging prevailing notions of military inevitability.



Yuri, whose sentence for conscientious objection was due in June, has insisted on the possibility of avoiding wars and the value of solidarity and dialogue, against all odds, as a strategy to prevent wars.

- **Sara Ibrahim Abdelgalil**, Sudanese doctor and democracy advocate, passionately criticized the failures of international law in addressing Sudan's crisis, highlighting the neglect of the Sudanese diaspora and atrocities committed by militias with impunity, questioning the paralyzed role of international institutions like the UN.
- **Ashka Naik**, Corporate Accountability, spotlighted the intersection of capitalism, war economies, and corporate greed, advocating for redirecting resources from militarism to essential services like education and healthcare.
- **Arthur Muliro**, Society for International Development, lamented Africa's post-colonial struggles, citing conflicts fueled by external interests seeking to exploit the continent's resources, and projected the need for designing foresight scenarios of intergenerational hope – as the current crisis is not a destiny, although change will require time, knowledge and a lot of intelligent belief in the future.
- **Juliette Mattijssen**, People's Health Movement, presented the example of students encampments in The Netherlands as a form of civil society resistance both against the genocide in Palestine and the government's and universities' support to Israel's violation of IHL.

The workshop served as a clarion call for renewed solidarity across civil society actors. It challenged participants to confront uncomfortable truths about systemic injustices and impunity, and to boldly forge collective strategies prioritizing human dignity and rights, especially looking at future generations.

As CSOs navigate an increasingly complex global landscape of escalating conflicts and political polarization, the G2H2 workshop underscored that the climate of war demands a steadfast commitment to uphold justice and humanity. While the workshop did not have any particular actionable goal in itself, G2H2 intends to continue building on this crowd of solidarity bridging commitments and possible ideas for political positioning in Geneva, and beyond.



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