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As the representative organization of Israel's physicians, we were shocked and dismayed to read the content of "Call for urgent action for an immediate ceasefire and respect for international humanitarian law" signed by Italian academics.

We cannot speak for the Israeli government or the Israeli military. We speak as Israeli physicians.

There are many factual inaccuracies in your letter that others have pointed out, as well as the almost complete disregard of the terrorist massacre and abductions of October 7. However, we would like to focus on one very troubling aspect of your letter, and that is your call for an academic boycott of Israeli academics and institutions.

The very concept of exploiting the field of academia to further political agendas rather than engaging in the pursuit and sharing of knowledge is contrary to what academia is and often harmful to the very people it seeks to protect. The exchange of knowledge and information and academic collaboration is beneficial to all mankind, and particularly to underprivileged populations.

Israeli physicians have always, and continue to, provide care to sick and wounded Palestinian patients who are allowed by Hamas to leave the West bank or Gaza Strip. We train Palestinian doctors in Israeli hospitals so that they can return and care for their populations. In the case of an academic boycott against Israel, who do you think will suffer the most?

As physicians, we of course mourn the loss of every human life, and especially that of children. This is why we support the alleviation of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza by any means, be it provision of humanitarian aid, ensuring safe passage for Gazan civilians or treatment of sick and wounded civilians in Israel. Unfortunately, although the facts are not fully clear, there is mounting evidence that Hamas has been using the Gazan people in general, and healthcare facilities (along with kindergartens, schools and residential homes) in particular, as bases for their warfare and terrorism.

It was Israel who built and helped staff Shifa hospital, until those doctors and administrators were replaced to a large extent by Hamas accomplices. Even now, there appears to be evidence that Hamas has redirected fuel meant for hospitals for its own uses. We respect healthcare facilities as sacrosanct-when they are being used as healthcare facilities, and not as terror bases.

We urge you to carefully consider your facts, as well as the repercussions of your call for an academic boycott against Israel. We call for open dialogue, not hatred and boycotts. Most of all, we call for the peace and protection of all innocent people.

Prof. Zion Hagay

President Israel Medical Association