

Accountability is key for protecting health workers



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On Sept 22, 2017, during the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly, experts and representatives from international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and UN member states convened for *Protecting Health Care in Armed Conflict*. The high-level side event was a collaboration between the Permanent Missions of Canada, the Netherlands, Spain, and UK, and *The Lancet–American University of Beirut Commission* and the *Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition*.

The event was a sombre acknowledgment that although the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2286 in May, 2016, calling for the end of attacks on civilian health-care infrastructure and health workers in conflict situations, the rate of attacks has continued apace. In the days prior, reports of more attacks on health facilities and personnel in Idlib and Hama, Syria, surfaced, prompting a strongly worded condemnation by WHO.

Central to the discussion was the disconnect between the international rebukes of the attacks and the lack of appropriate recourse. Although there is general

agreement that the weaponisation of health workers and humanitarian abuses have become an unacceptable new normal, the international response, in particular the course taken by the Security Council, has been wholly inadequate. Several speakers pointed out the seeming paralysis in stemming the atrocities, but were quick to offer concrete steps to translate attention to action, including greater emphasis on documentation and reporting, regular country-specific briefings to the Security Council, and establishing a tribunal for prosecuting war crimes.

The civil war, in its seventh year, continues to devastate the people of Syria. Where there has been admonishment, there must now be accountability. Member states must enforce the resolution, local operators and NGOs responsible for accurate reporting on attacks must be supported, and the perpetrators must be punished. Unprecedented as the situation in Syria has been, the unabated attacks on health workers are a profound erosion of international humanitarian law. Without accountability in Syria, there is no accountability anywhere. ■ *The Lancet*

For *Protecting Health Care in Armed Conflict* see <https://aub.edu.lb/lcs/Pages/unga.aspx>

For *The Lancet–American University of Beirut* see *Lancet Commission* <http://www.thelancet.com/commissions/Syria>

For *UN Security Council Resolution 2286* see <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2286>

A multisectoral approach to childhood development



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On Sept 20, at *Financing the Future: Education 2030*, a high-level UN conference in New York City, NY, USA, international leaders pledged to end the global education crisis. Without immediate action, by 2030 an estimated 825 million of the 1.6 billion young people in the world will be unable to reach their full potential—a catastrophic failure to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4: inclusive and quality education for all. But investment in education alone is not enough. The *Lancet Series on Early Childhood Development* highlighted health, nutrition, child protection, and safe peer environments, in addition to education, as factors that contribute to ensuring success for young people.

Ending Violence in Childhood, a report released by Know Violence in Childhood on Sept 26, shows that in the past year, at least three of every four of the world's children have experienced abuse, interpersonal violence, or another form of cruelty. Violence against children reaches beyond immediate trauma and the effects can be syndemic, leading to depression and behavioural problems, impaired mental wellbeing affecting

educational achievement, and increased vulnerability to substance abuse and poor sexual and reproductive health. For many, violence in childhood will have dire life-long consequences, which can perpetuate through continuing generations.

Know Violence in Childhood calls for governments to prevent all forms of childhood abuse. A new composite Violence in Childhood Index will track global progress to end violence. The index shows that violence in childhood is ubiquitous and is independent of national income per capita. Encouragingly, however, an inverse association between human development and childhood violence exists—that is, countries committed to a development agenda have higher child survival, more girls being educated at high school, and lower rates of childhood violence.

All children have the right to be safe, to be educated, and to be nurtured. Our Series called for multisectoral policies to address barriers to development in early childhood. Such policies must also extend to adolescents and through the life course. ■ *The Lancet*

For more on *Early Childhood Development* see *Lancet Series* <http://www.thelancet.com/series/ECD2016>

For *Financing the Future: Education 2030* see <http://www.globalpartnership.org/event/financing-future-education-2030>

For *Ending Violence in Childhood* see <http://globalreport.knowviolenceinchildhood.org/>