

Doctors Against Genocide inaugural conference details health disaster in Gaza amid press boycott

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Doctors Against Genocide, a global health organization committed to confronting and preventing genocide, held its inaugural conference in Dearborn, Michigan, on Saturday, May 18, at the Ford Community and Performing Arts Center.

The event titled “A Century of Genocide on Palestine” brought together medical health professionals and anti-genocide advocates in the US and internationally. Experts in a variety of medical fields gave reports on different aspects of the ongoing US-Israeli assault on Gaza, which has seen the destruction of critical infrastructure and the displacement of virtually the entire population.

Doctors Against Genocide was founded in 2023 and has been conducting advocacy and public awareness of the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Among the headlined speakers at the conference were Dr. Ghassan Abu Sittah, a plastic and reconstructive surgeon, and Dr. Yasser Abu Jamel, Director General of the Gaza Mental Health Community Program. Detroit Democratic Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib spoke, as did Dr. Jill Stein, Green Party presidential candidate. Francesca Albanese, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, a scathing critic of the Israeli genocide, had been scheduled to speak but did not attend.

Event organizers welcomed the *World Socialist Web Site* to the event, which was boycotted and blacked out by the corporate media. A team from Mehring Books sold more than one dozen copies of the book *The Logic of Zionism, from Nationalist Myth to the Gaza Genocide* by WSWWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North.

Dr. Abu Sittah led the first panel, “Understanding Genocide; Medical and Ethical Perspectives.” The doctor is a British-Palestinian plastic and reconstructive surgeon and rector at Glasgow University. He had treated patients at Gaza’s Al-Shifa Hospital during the Israeli siege. He was recently denied entry into Germany, France and the Netherlands. No reason for the ban was advanced, although

it has now apparently been lifted.

Dr. Abu Sittah reported that malnourishment was a major factor in the increasing death rate among patients in Gaza because of the failure of wounds to heal properly. He said that he estimated that one-half of the amputations being performed in Gaza were necessitated by the collapse of the healthcare system.

He said that he believed Israel had deliberately chosen hospitals, such as Al-Shifa, because of their prestige and international connections in order to test global reaction and set a standard of impunity for its crimes. He went on to blast the supposed “humanitarian” air drops and the pier being constructed by the United States in Gaza, explaining they were a “facade” aimed at prolonging the genocide by providing a cover for Israel.

He also took aim at the British Medical Association, which like the American Medical Association has refused to condemn the killing of its own members by Israeli forces in Gaza. He noted that doctors who dared to speak out were being pursued and vilified.

Dr. Mustafa Barghouti of the Palestine Medical Relief Society, who had been in Gaza during previous Israeli incursions, spoke remotely. He said the present scale of destruction was “beyond imagination.”

He estimated that in addition to the official death toll, 10,000 were missing under the rubble and warned that many of those listed as injured will eventually die because of present conditions.

He pointed out that 5.3 percent of Gazans had been killed or injured, the equivalent of 18 million casualties proportionately in the US. Over 429 medical personnel have been killed, and horrifying stories are emerging, including the torture of a hospital director by Israeli forces by use of electric shocks.

Speaking at the second panel, “100 Years of Genocide on Palestine,” Dr. Anis Kassem, professor of international law, said that Israel had saved South Africa the trouble of proving

“intent” to commit genocide in its case brought before the International Court of Justice. Various pronouncements by high-level officials showed explicit intent, including the statement by Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who called Palestinians “human animals.”

Forced displacement, Dr. Barghouti said, was a key method of killing, while the most devastating tool of the genocide was the complete destruction of the medical system in Gaza.

Also speaking during the panel was Representative Tlaib, the only Palestinian American member of Congress and a member of the Democratic Socialists of America. She called Israel’s bombing of hospitals in Gaza a “war crime.” She stated, “True genocide is unfolding before our eyes.”

She continued, “I care that our country is silent and enabling” genocide. The US is “setting a precedent. They dehumanize Palestinians to justify mass murder.” She also denounced Biden for sending “\$15 billion to Israel without regard to human rights laws.”

However, the self-professed “socialist” Tlaib never uttered the words “capitalism” or “imperialism” in reference to the ongoing genocide, nor did she try to explain why, in the face of such shocking and outrageous crimes, she and fellow DSA members, such as Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, were continuing to back the re-election of Biden, the chief enabler of Israeli war crimes, and to work within the Democratic Party.

Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein was also scathing in her indictment of US government policy, declaring, “We are looking at the most horrific genocide on record; the most rapid and destructive in modern history.” She noted that the “torture and murder of children on an industrial scale” was being normalized. She called for creating an “unstoppable uprising” and at one point mentioned a “general strike.”

However, Stein did not suggest the necessity for a break with the existing political structures and called for a general strike without reference to the working class or a struggle against capitalism and its reactionary nation-state system.

In the afternoon panel, First Hand Testimonials, Dr. Yasser Abu Jamel, director-general of the Gaza Community Health Program, spoke of the “severe psychological impacts” of the Israeli onslaught, including the fact that two-thirds of housing in Gaza has been destroyed to date.

Dr. Aseel Awad, a pediatrician, spoke about the impact of these events on childhood. She noted that continual exposure to stress hormones, what she called “toxic stress,” will eventually impact vital organs increasing the risk of such things as asthma and COPD.

She called the systematic starvation of the population of Gaza, that includes 1 million children, a “massacre in slow

motion.”

Another panelist detailed the results of a study based on public sources detailing the destruction of critical infrastructure in Gaza. The report, based on satellite photos at an earlier stage of the Israeli assault, showed that in the area studied, 61 percent of medical facilities, 50 percent of educational facilities and 30 percent of water infrastructure had been damaged or destroyed.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to one of the organizers of the conference, Dr. Marie Najjar, about Doctors Against Genocide. She explained, “I joined as part of the founding board in December. All of our members are volunteers. We all work full-time in our medical professions, and we are working to mobilize other healthcare workers. Some of our main initiatives are advocacy.”

Asked about the refusal of the American Medical Association to condemn the attacks on healthcare facilities in Gaza, she said, “They have made a public stance that they are essentially not going to get involved.”

She noted the double standard observed by the AMA in relation to the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. “With Ukraine they have been very vocal about medical neutrality not being observed and healthcare workers being targeted. They have sent \$100,000 to help in Ukraine.” She added that in contrast, “They have made a specific stance to not take a stance about Palestine, because it is not American.”

She continued, “People are losing their jobs for speaking out about what is right. You grow up learning about the Holocaust, reading the *Diary of Anne Frank*, watching *Schindler’s List*. I grew up thinking ‘how can this ever happen?’ I am seeing in my lifetime how it can happen.”

“We have it on video. It is every day. We have access to all of this with our own eyes.”

This reporter pointed out that opposition to war and genocide was being criminalized, as shown by the mass arrest of US college students protesting genocide and the arrest of socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk in Ukraine for opposing the war.

She replied, “It is very similar to what happened during World War II. If you spoke out against atrocities, you could be arrested. It is the same thing. If you don’t learn history, you are doomed to repeat it. A lot of those who are making these decisions have studied history.”



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