Letter to editor

An ethical condemnation of attacks on Iran's civilian medical, scientific, and educational centers

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Dear Editor,

We are submitting the following statement on behalf of the Foundation of Wisdom, History, and Medical Ethics of the Islamic Republic of Iran for your consideration. We believe that the ethical and legal implications discussed herein are of critical importance to the academic community and the discourse on medical ethics during times of conflict.

Educational and healthcare environments are considered vital infrastructure in every society and play a fundamental role in the physical, mental, and social health of people, particularly children and adolescents. International humanitarian law emphasizes the need to protect the safety of social spaces. In alignment with the tenets of bioethics and to preserve public health, any action (including the bombing of schools, universities, and hospitals) that endangers the health of the general population, especially children, constitutes a clear violation of the inherent dignity of humans and a breach of the principles of the protection of civilians, particularly vulnerable groups.

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The bombing of the Shajareh Tayyebeh School in Minab, Iran, which resulted in the martyrdom of

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168 innocent children, was a grave violation of international humanitarian laws**.** As reported by the Deputy Minister of Health, Treatment, and Medical Education, widespread damage has been inflicted on Iran's healthcare infrastructure as of April 26, 2026, with documented impact on 49 emergency stations, 40 medical centers, 193 healthcare facilities, and 7 hospital units (1)**.** Also, 32 universities have been severely affected, as well as the Pasteur Institute of Iran, an institution with a longstanding role in vaccine development, infectious disease surveillance, and public health research in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region (2).

Such actions represent a clear breach of the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and are entirely unjustifiable. Attacks that inflict harm on civilians, particularly children and patients, violate the principle of distinction. Moreover, the targeting of medical, educational, and scientific institutions cannot be justified by legitimate military objectives and therefore contravenes the principles of proportionality and humanity. These acts are ethically and legally unacceptable and have imposed profound and lasting suffering upon societies. Moreover, the absence of preventive warnings and the failure to adopt necessary measures to protect civilians' lives constitute a clear violation of the principle of precaution and stand in evident contradiction to legal and ethical obligations.

Observance of ethical principles in armed conflicts is not only a legal obligation but also an essential condition for preserving the normative order of the international community and the moral conscience of humanity. Accordingly, while strongly condemning violations of these principles, and in view of the mission of health communities and science foundations in safeguarding human dignity and protecting public health, the following requests are submitted to international institutions:

1. All obligations stipulated in international humanitarian law (3), the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions (4), the Customary International Humanitarian Law of the International Committee of the Red Cross (5), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (6), the ethical guidelines of the World Health Organization (7), and the fundamental principles of medical ethics, professional oaths, and other relevant documents concerning the rights of children and patients to physical and mental

health should be fully observed without any conditions.

2. The complete immunity of civilians, particularly vulnerable groups, as well as the personnel providing vital healthcare, education, scientific, and public services to society, should be guaranteed.

3. The security of medical, scientific, educational, cultural, and other service infrastructures of society should be fully and definitively ensured against any form of harm. Preserving the sanctity of these centers is not only a legal obligation but also a vital measure for preventing physical and psychological harm within societies.

4. In order to heal this great human suffering and to prevent the continuation or recurrence of similar incidents, necessary measures must be adopted, and immediate and effective actions must be taken by relevant assemblies and international institutions.

We call upon the international community to uphold its moral and legal responsibilities by taking decisive and principled action to address the grave ethical breaches at the intersection of armed conflict and medical ethics, as underscored in this statement.

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