



**69th UNGA, New York
September 25, 2014**

**Using Science and Medicine to
Stop Human Rights Violations**

"Health Care & Violence: the Need for Effective Protection"
Prepared Remarks: Andrea Gittleman, Interim Director of U.S. Policy

Physicians for Human Rights, a member of the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, would like to express our appreciation to the World Health Organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross for highlighting this issue of attacks on health. Physicians for Human Rights hopes that this discussion will lead to stronger prevention efforts, more consistent documentation, and effective accountability to address and deter attacks.

As we contemplate crises erupting around the globe – not just conflicts but health crises, it is apparent that doctors, nurses, and other health workers are not just in the frontlines trying to save lives but have also become targets. From Syria, where Physicians for Human Rights has documented the systematic targeting of health workers and facilities, to West Africa where attacks on health workers are hampering efforts to combat Ebola, they are too often targeted because of the essential work they do.

Attacks on health are attacks on entire communities. When a hospital is militarized, or a doctor is disappeared, all those in need of medical assistance are harmed. Physicians for Human Rights has seen attacks on health used as a strategic weapon by oppressive forces to inflict harm on broad swaths of the civilian population.

No matter the country or context, there must be a stronger international effort to protect health workers, facilities, transport, and supplies; protect the impartiality and other professional ethics of health workers; and ensure that all people can safely access the care they need. Attacks on health – no matter the perpetrator and no matter the situation – must be addressed by the WHO and UN member states.

As we discuss documentation, prevention, and protection today, we must not forget accountability. Such attacks are not just reprehensible, but they also are unlawful. If conducted in a widespread or systematic manner they may be crimes against humanity, and – in times of armed conflict – they may be war crimes. Attacks on health must be addressed as the serious crimes they are, not as accidental or somehow acceptable side-effects of conflict or unrest. Physicians for Human Rights, and health workers around the world, would welcome a General Assembly resolution on attacks on health care to demonstrate the international commitment to ending attacks on health.

The international community should ensure that attacks on health remain a taboo – not a new normal.

Thank you