



## **Israeli Premier urged to Reconsider Proposed Law Allowing Forced Feeding of Hunger Strikers**

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(19.06.2014) An urgent plea to the Prime Minister of Israel to reconsider the proposed law allowing forced feeding of detainees on hunger strike has been made by the heads of the World Medical Association.

In a letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the President and Chair of the WMA, Dr. Margaret Mungherera and Dr. Mukesh Haikerwal, say that force feeding is tantamount to torture.

They write: 'Clearly torture and inhumane and degrading treatments are practices with which a doctor should not be involved in any way. Force feeding is violent, often painful and absolutely against the principle of individual autonomy. It is a degrading treatment, inhumane and may amount to torture. Worse still, it is the most unsuitable approach to save lives.'

The letter comes against the background of a hunger strike among Palestinian detainees and as the Israeli Parliament prepares to consider new legislation to allow forced feeding. But the WMA leaders say there are far better ways of dealing with hunger strikes. Evidence showed the best results were obtained when the patient/physician relationship was maintained, even under the difficult circumstance of a hunger strike. This included patient confidentiality, proper medical care and advice from the physician, while respecting the free will of the patient.

'Force feeding is completely incompatible with this methodology and it destroys any patient/physician trust', they add.

The WMA says it fully supports the initiatives for medical care proposed by the Israeli Medical Association and it recommends Mr Netanyahu 'putting your trust in their professional medical management rather than in a degrading and inhumane treatment which usually fails and is of questionable ethical and moral construction.'

The letter says that an in depth review of forced feeding has shown that it may fulfil an

immediate and necessary requirement but, in reality, its aims will not be achieved.

The two WMA leaders conclude their letter: 'For the sake of all the people involved here - prisoners, detainees as well as physicians and others involved in their management - their safety and the reputation of your country, we urge you to please reconsider this step. It has been criticised internationally. It will not help the problem you wish to solve.

'The IMA can help. Our Israeli colleagues are able to deal with the situation, if only they are allowed to establish a real patient/physician relationship without threats and interference from prison authorities. Should there be need for further counselling we are very willing to assist.'

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