

Half a Century After Biko: South Africa's Health Council Punishes Another Doctor for Speaking Truth to Power

A Statement by South African Civil Society, Global Organisations and Individuals

7 November 2025

History Is Repeating Itself

Nearly fifty years ago, the death of Steve Biko [exposed](#) how the South African Medical and Dental Council (SAMDC) and the Medical Association of South Africa (MASA), had abandoned its ethical duty to the people it was meant to protect.

It shielded doctors who collaborated with apartheid authorities, legitimised racist medical appointments, and ignored the torture and neglect of political detainees. Its inaction made it complicit in state violence. Today its successor, the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), is repeating that failure.

In October 2025, the HPCSA fined Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng, South Africa's United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, for "bringing the profession into disrepute" over tweets condemning Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The ICC has issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, including starvation of civilians, persecution, and intentionally directing attacks on a civilian population. Those warrants remain in force after judges rejected Israel's bid to withdraw them. The complaint was filed by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), an organisation whose stated purpose is to foster support for Israel. The HPCSA accepted this political complaint, investigated a UN mandate-holder for exercising free expression in her personal capacity, and punished her under Regulation 4(9) for "inappropriate language on social media."

A Dangerous and Shameful Precedent

A professional body in democratic South Africa has sanctioned a doctor for condemning a leader subject to ICC arrest warrants for war crimes and crimes against humanity, not for clinical misconduct. Dr Mofokeng's comments reflect her moral outrage at deliberate attacks that have devastated hospitals, health workers, and civilians, issues squarely within her lifelong commitment to health justice. A UN Commission of Inquiry has since found that Israel has committed genocide in Gaza.

The HPCSA's decision recasts ethical speech as “unprofessional conduct.” It signals a willingness to silence conscience at the request of a foreign-policy lobby. In doing so, it betrays South Africa's constitutional values and the spirit of the Hippocratic Oath.

The UN's Silence Is Complicity

When the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng in July 2020 as the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, it was not merely conferring a title. It was entrusting her with one of the UN's most demanding mandates: to investigate and expose violations of the right to health across the world, including in conflict zones, and to speak truth to governments and power brokers who prefer silence.

In doing so, the UN made a commitment to uphold her independence and safety. The Terms of Reference for Special Procedures Mandate-Holders of the Human Rights Council require that mandate-holders “be free from intimidation, interference, harassment or reprisals,” and that the UN take “all necessary measures to assist them in carrying out their functions safely and effectively.” That commitment has not been honoured.

This is not the first time UN mandate-holders have been left without meaningful institutional support. In his 2016 report, Special Rapporteur Philip Alston described the UN's handling of the Haiti cholera outbreak as “a disgrace,” noting how accountability was sacrificed for diplomacy.

Special Rapporteurs serve voluntarily and at personal risk. When a mandate-holder is sanctioned at home for denouncing atrocity crimes, institutional silence from the UN undermines the very independence that gives its human-rights system legitimacy. It tells those appointed in these capacities that their labour is welcome, but their political integrity is expendable. The UN's unwillingness to defend Dr Mofokeng as she faces sanction for fulfilling her mandate sends a devastating message to every expert who dares to speak truth within its structures: courage will be celebrated in speeches, but punished in practice.

Never Again

This moment transcends one case. It exposes the fragility of professional ethics when politics intrudes. The right to health cannot be disentangled from the right to speak against violence that destroys health systems and kills doctors. By seeking to punish Dr Mofokeng, the HPCSA chills all health professionals who speak against atrocity and name perpetrators.

The SAMDC once stood on the wrong side of history when it excused doctors who watched a political detainee die in custody. The HPCSA now risks joining them, attacking a woman doctor for speaking truth about a wanted man under ICC arrest warrants for war crimes and crimes against humanity. South Africa's medical regulators once failed Steve Biko. They must not fail Tlaleng Mofokeng.

Justice requires reversing this decision, acknowledging the error, and restoring integrity to a profession built on the promise to do no harm.

Our Demands

We, the undersigned South African and global organisations, and individuals, call for:

1. Immediate withdrawal of the HPCSA's baseless finding and fine against Dr Mofokeng.
2. A public apology from the HPCSA for entertaining a politically motivated complaint outside its proper remit.
3. An internal review to prevent similar abuse of process by partisan actors.
4. A formal statement from the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights affirming Dr Mofokeng's independence and condemning retaliation against Special Rapporteurs.

As South African health and social justice organisations, individuals, and global allies, we stand with Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng, just as past generations stood with Steve Biko and all who refused to separate medicine from morality.

We will not allow the lessons of our history to be erased, nor will we remain silent as another doctor is punished for speaking truth.

In standing with Dr Mofokeng, we defend not only her name but the principle that health, justice, and freedom are inseparable.

Signed,

Individuals	Organisations
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Archbishop Thabo Makgoba (Anglican Church, South Africa)2. Elinor Sisulu (South Africa)3. Dr Ghassan Abu Sitta (Rector, University of Glasgow, Scotland)4. Prof. Shabir Madhi, (University of the Witwatersrand,, South Africa.)5. Emeritus Professor Usuf Chikte (Stellenbosch University, South Africa)6. Emeritus Associate Professor Gonda Perez (South Africa)7. Sibongile Tshabalala (Treatment Action Campaign, South Africa)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. African Alliance, South Africa2. Health Justice Initiative (HJI), South Africa3. Foundation for Human Rights (FHR), South Africa4. Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), South Africa5. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)6. Legal Resources Centre (LRC), South Africa7. Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), South Africa8. Peoples Health Movement South Africa (PHM-SA), South Africa

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>8. Prof. Francois Venter, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa</p> <p>9. Dr Mohamed Fazel Randerer (South Africa)</p> <p>10. Fatima Hassan (Health Justice Initiative, South Africa)</p> <p>11. Tian Johnson (African Alliance, South Africa)</p> <p>12. Prof. Linda-Gail Bekker (Desmond Tutu Health Foundation (DTHF), South Africa)</p> <p>13. Trude Bennett (Jewish Voice for Peace Health Advisory Council, USA)</p> <p>14. Ruth Sacks (South African Jews for a Free Palestine (SAJ4FP), South Africa)</p> <p>15. Prof. Hassan Mahomed (Health Care Workers for Palestine SA, South Africa)</p> <p>16. Prof. Leslie London (Health & Human Rights Programme, University of Cape Town, South Africa)</p> <p>17. Prof. Ames Dhali (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa)</p> <p>18. Dr Shuaib Manjra (Health Justice Initiative, South Africa)</p> <p>19. Noncedo Madubedube (Maphabil' ABANTU, South Africa)</p> <p>20. Dr Sithembile Mbete (South Africa)</p> <p>21. Prof Matthew Kavanaugh, Georgetown University, USA</p> <p>22. Dr Krishna Vallabhjee, South Africa</p> <p>23. Amy Hagopian, Seattle, University of Washington, Seattle Washington, USA</p> <p>24. Moegammad Tahier Kara, Stellenbosch for Palestine, South Africa</p> <p>25. Rehana Dada, South Africa</p> <p>26. Mohammed Ziyaad Hassen, South Africa</p> <p>27. Alastair W M Hay, University of Leeds, United Kingdom</p> <p>28. Christine Truter, South Africa</p> <p>29. Nicoletta Dentico, Society for International Development (SID), Rome / Nairobi</p> <p>30. Tasneem Mohamed, BioArt, South Africa</p> | <p>9. Peoples Health Movement, Eastern and Southern Africa (PHM-ESA)</p> <p>10. People's Health Movement, North America (PHM-NA)</p> <p>11. Health Care Workers for Palestine, South Africa</p> <p>12. Ahmed Kathrada Foundation (AKF), South Africa</p> <p>13. Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC), South Africa</p> <p>14. South African BDS Coalition, South Africa</p> <p>15. Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), South Africa</p> <p>16. Palestinian Solidarity Alliance (PSA), South Africa</p> <p>17. Triangle Project, South Africa</p> <p>18. Advocacy for Prevention of HIV and AIDS (APHA), South Africa</p> <p>19. Kopanang Africa Against Xenophobia (KAAX), South Africa</p> <p>20. Open Secrets, South Africa</p> <p>21. Rural Health Advocacy Project (RHAP), South Africa</p> <p>22. Health GAP, USA</p> <p>23. Initiative for Medicines, Access & Knowledge (I-MAK), USA</p> <p>24. Sex Worker and Education Trust (SWEAT), South Africa</p> <p>25. My Vote Counts (MVC), South Africa</p> <p>26. Institute for Social and Health Sciences, South Africa</p> <p>27. #LetGazaEat, South Africa</p> <p>28. Islamic Medical Association of South Africa (IMASA), South Africa</p> <p>29. MINA Foundation, South Africa</p> <p>30. International Office, University of the Western Cape, South Africa</p> <p>31. Under The Rainbow, South Africa</p> <p>32. Sonke Gender Justice, South Africa</p> <p>33. Extinction Rebellion, Gauteng, South Africa</p> <p>34. Social Intifada, South Africa</p> |
|---|--|

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>31. Dr Aref Bassa, South Africa</p> <p>32. Fatima Parker, South Africa</p> <p>33. Kharnita Mohamed, University of Cape Town, South Africa</p> <p>34. Siraj Allie, South Africa</p> <p>35. Dr Rushdah Lariza Khan, Health Care Workers for Palestine SA, South Africa</p> <p>36. Lucky Thwala, Sisonke Revolutionary Movement, South Africa</p> <p>37. Fatimah Ramadolela, The Community Hope Project, South Africa</p> <p>38. Peter Monethe , Abahlali base Freedom Park, South Africa</p> <p>39. Dr Ntlotleng Mabena, Open House, South Africa</p> <p>40. Prof. Umesh Bawa, University of the Western Cape, South Africa</p> <p>41. Professor Collet Dandara, University of Cape Town, South Africa</p> <p>42. Annette Griessel, PGD, South Africa</p> <p>43. Lindiwe Khumalo, South Africa</p> <p>44. Prof. Muhannad Ayyash, Canada, Mount Royal University, Calgary, Canada</p> <p>45. Simcha Srebnik , University of British Columbia, Canada</p> <p>46. Gaoreteleloe Moropa, South Africa</p> <p>47. Ongeziwe Ndevu, Sisonke Revolutionary Movement, Orange Farm, South Africa</p> <p>48. Ikram Abrahams, South Africa</p> <p>49. Natasha Scott, Sisonke Revolutionary Movement, Orange Farm, South Africa</p> <p>50. Lindiwe Kubheka, Lindokuhle Social Welfare, Orange Farm, South Africa</p> <p>51. Shoyab Wadee, Islamic Medical Association of South Africa (IMASA), South Africa</p> <p>52. Kerry Scott, School of Global Health, York University, Toronto, Canada</p> <p>53. Marcus Toerien , KPSG, South Africa</p> <p>54. Bongani Uhuru Jonas, Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA), South Africa</p> | <p>35. Conscious Consumers for Palestine, South Africa</p> <p>36. Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA), South Africa</p> <p>37. De Gezondheidszaak (People's Health Movement), Netherlands</p> <p>38. Visual Intifada, South Africa</p> <p>39. Gordon's Bay Islamic Society, South Africa</p> <p>40. Academics for Palestine, South Australia</p> <p>41. Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA), South Africa</p> <p>42. Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE), South Africa</p> <p>43. Zimbabwe Palestine Solidarity Council, Zimbabwe</p> <p>44. Scottish Friends of Palestine, Glasgow, United Kingdom</p> <p>45. Potch. for Palestine, South Africa</p> <p>46. The Public Interest Practice, South Africa</p> <p>47. Intersectional Psychology, South Africa</p> <p>48. Rondebosch East Pharmacy, South Africa</p> <p>49. Æqua, Switzerland</p> <p>50. Madrasah Ihyaa Id-Deen, South Africa</p> <p>51. Rural Islamic Welfare Association, South Africa</p> <p>52. Mycelium Media Colab, South Africa</p> <p>53. Western Cape Cerebral Palsy Association, South Africa</p> <p>54. Hout Bay Family Medical Centre, South Africa</p> <p>55. Public Servants Association of South Africa-Tshwane, South Africa</p> <p>56. Home Truths Productions, South Africa</p> <p>57. Maphabil' ABANTU, South Africa</p> <p>58. CBFA, South Africa</p> <p>59. GMTG, South Africa</p> |
|--|---|

55. Prof R Galvaan , University of Cape Town, South Africa
56. Mohamed Iqbal Kayam, South Africa
57. Dr Ashraf Grimwood, South Africa
58. Farouk Engar, South Africa
59. Mohamed Ahmed, South Africa
60. Namuma Mulindi, Sonke Gender Justice, South Africa
61. Mads Kaern, University of Ottawa, Canada
62. Abed Elfattah Dolah, Palestine
63. Kevin Brand, University of Ottawa, Canada
64. Z Badat, South Africa
65. Tal Jarus, University of British Columbia, Canada
66. Thomas Foth, University of Ottawa, Canada
67. Jon Jureidini, Adelaide, University of Adelaide, Australia
68. Connie Musolino, University of Adelaide, Australia
69. Dr. F Khan, South Africa
70. Pete Venticich, Public Health Association of Australia, Australia
71. Dr Bianca Treu, Public Health Association of Australia, Australia
72. Ibrahim Bechrouri, University of Ottawa, Canada
73. Paul Laris, Peoples Health Movement, Adelaide, Australia
74. Sharad Onta, People's Health Movement, Nepal
75. Carmen Baez, People's Health Movement, Argentina
76. Tan Nguyen Naarm, Deakin University, Australia
77. Julia Anaf, Australia
78. Dr Suleiman Hajee, Path24 Laboratory, South Africa
79. Dr Shabbir Ahmed Khan, St. Annes Hospital, South Africa

80. Sarah Leavitt, University of British Columbia, Canada
81. Carina Coetzee, Kensington Palestinian Solidarity Group, South Africa
82. Cassim Peer, Gordon's Bay Islamic Society, South Africa
83. Sarah Davids, South Africa
84. Limakatso Mofokeng, Sisonke Movement, South Africa
85. Michael Maeorg, Academics for Palestine SA, Adelaide
86. Monica Albonico, South Africa
87. Jack Desbiolles, Academics for Palestine, Adelaide, Australia
88. Molly Fairweather, Australia
89. Munir Akhalwaya, South Africa
90. Alan Paul, Extinction Rebellion, KZN, South Africa
91. Yaa Mensah-King, South Africa
92. Mduduzi Tshabalala, Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA), South Africa
93. Bradley Fortuin, Botswana
94. Yahya Nana, Gauteng, Ahmed Kathrada Hospital, South Africa
95. Mike v Graan, South Africa
96. Mariam Mayet, South Africa
97. T Manjra, South Africa
98. Abduh Mahomed, South Africa
99. Mafa Kwanisai Mafa, Zimbabwe Palestine Solidarity Council, Zimbabwe
100. Osman Aboo, South Africa
101. Deborah Ewing, South Africa
102. Elias Baig, South Africa
103. Shashikant Ramji, South Africa
104. Dr Aziz Moosa, South Africa
105. Shaheeda Sadeck, Institute for Healing Memories, South Africa
106. Dr Raman-Abdulla, Health Care Workers for Palestine South Africa, South Africa
107. Yousuf Cajee, South Africa
108. Ismail Bhorat, South Africa
109. Mahomed Moolla, South Africa
110. Kay Dawie, South Africa

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>111. Fatima Docrat, South Africa
112. AK Peer, Islamic Medical Association of South Africa (IMASA), South Africa
113. Thahir Mitha, Parklands Hospital, South Africa
114. Suleiman Essa, South Africa
115. Dr AM Kadwa, St Augustine's Hospital, South Africa
116. Ahmed, Robert M Sobukwe Hospital, South Africa
117. Fathima Shaikh, Islamic Medical Association of South Africa (IMASA), South Africa
118. Maliha Ahmed, South Africa
119. Farhana Suleman, Kalafong Hospital, South Africa
120. Nurain Saloojee, Palestine Solidarity Alliance Youth League, South Africa
121. Fatima Simjee, South Africa
122. Dr Mahomed Solwa, Islamic Medical Association of South Africa (IMASA), South Africa
123. Feroza Amien, University of Cape Town, South Africa
124. Aneesa Moosa, South Africa
125. Yaaiera Suliman, South Africa
126. Naeem Khan, South Africa
127. Dr K N Gaffoor, DIPA, South Africa
128. Yusuf Arieff, Healthcare Workers for Palestine South Africa, South Africa
129. Mikhail Kleinsmidt, Healthcare Workers for Palestine South Africa, South Africa
130. Kathleen Ruff, Right on Canada, Canada
131. Dr Raman-Abdulla, Healthcare Workers for Palestine South Africa, South Africa
132. Tahir Taylor, South Africa
133. Timothy Visser, South Africa
134. R Pillay, Scotland
135. Frances Baum, People's Health Movement, Australia
136. Lizo Mkhutshulwa, South Africa
137. Dr N Theunissen, South Africa</p> | |
|---|--|

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>138. Alexis Benoe, PHM, Greece
139. Ziska Pretorius, Tshepong Hospital,
South Africa
140. Amani Bangula, Tshepong Hospital,
South Africa
141. Dr Samah El-Boraei, Health Care
Workers for Palestine SA, South Africa
142. Dr Suraya Ebrahim, South Africa
143. Dr Ebrahim Veriava, University of the
Witwatersrand, South Africa
144. Azra Ghoor, Rahima Moosa Hospital,
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
145. Leena Menghaney, India
146. Mahomed A K Omar, Centre for
Diabetes and Endocrinology, South Africa
147. Ismail Motala Matlosana, South Africa
148. Arshad Mosam, South Africa
149. Firdaus Williams, Perinatal HIV
Research Unit (PHRU), South Africa
150. Cathy Carpenter, Canada</p> | |
|--|--|

On-going endorsements are welcome [here](#).