

Can Online Petitions (e-Petitions), Open Letters and Calls from Medical Doctors and Health Academics Influence a Gaza 2023-24 War Ceasefire ?

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The 2023 War on Gaza has been referred to as a settler colonial led genocide in which Gazans have been victims of “humanity’s darkest hour”. (1) The healthcare system has been inadequately staffed and seen as unsustainable since the COVID-19 pandemic. (2) An immediate ceasefire was called for in online petitions or e-petitions, protests, and academic journals worldwide. (1) The ongoing blockade since 2007 and continuous aggressions by the occupiers caused Gaza’s healthcare system to be in a constant crisis emergency state prior to this war. (2, 3)

The popularized hashtag #CeasefireNow used on social media networking sites and on printed protest posters worldwide also has a global e-petition on Change.org. (4) Started on October 18, 2023, it has accumulated 999,001 supporters by the end of 2023, making it number three of the top five e-petitions of 2023. (5) At the time of this paper, the 249th day of war, it had 1,378,079 signatures *en route* to its next goal of 1,500,000. Similarly, Australian health care workers specifically address Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong in their e-petition on “the humanitarian disaster in Gaza”. (6)

E-petitions are used as a means to raise public awareness of social concerns. (7) Harrison et al. demonstrated that the combination of online media and conventional news outlets was seen to be effective in influencing individuals to sign an e-petition and mobilize the population to participate in such collective action. (8)

Academics are choosing to publish their support of the Palestinian cause and risk backlash rather than remain silent. (1, 3) Some academics have chosen to publish open letters with active calls for signatures from their health colleagues. (9) From American health faculty to British public health registrars, open letters are being written in solidarity. (10, 11) They call for a ceasefire with the United Nations, World Health Organization, Médecins sans Frontières, and many others. (9, 12)

A thematic analysis of social media content regarding the 2023 War revealed a profound sense of global empathy manifested towards Gaza. (13) Buheji et al. stated that empathy can be a powerful tool as it enhances cultural sensitivity, building solidarity with Gaza and Palestine as a whole. The dynamics of empathy can solicit social and political change through actions such as e-petitions. Empathy may potentially help Gazans and Palestinians remain resilient and hopeful as well.

The primary author is a non-Arab American married to a Gazan, and mother of medical students of Gaza (Gaza’s medical schools no longer stand). She is a public health researcher who has been studying Gaza’s need for health reform since 2020. (2) She lived in Gaza for the last few years and recently evacuated the war. This is her debut letter announcing a call for both a long-term ceasefire and an end to the occupation. At the same time, she is announcing that she left her home and family, debating the effects of doing so: good or bad.

As academics, we know the struggle of choosing to publish or not publish. As of November 16, 2023—only 40 days into the war—Ben Saad (2024) penned what he found to be the 17th humanitarian appeal published in scientific journals. (14) To date, *JBIMA* alone published 2 editorials, (15, 16) 4 letters to the editor, (17-20) and 4 academic articles. (21-24) When multiple pediatricians from various countries urge scholars to use their academic platforms, we feel compelled to join suit. (11) While the primary author has much more to lose than supporters and sympathizers to the war, here are our collective words.

As a war evacuee, the primary author attests to the fact that it did (and still does) help to watch, hear, read, and discuss—in astonishment (many times in tears)—Gaza-specific e-petitions, open letters, and research articles. The proportion of support, number of supporters, type of language used and its tone when referring to the people of Gaza, has been unlike anything ever witnessed or received before this current war. The empathy is surely felt. Thank you and please don't stop! Don't stop until #CeasefireNow is actualized and the occupation ends. Sign an Gaza-specific e-petition or open letter, and/or write a scholarly article today.

Disclaimers: The views expressed in the submitted article are those of the authors and not an official position of our institutions.

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