



Psychology's Response: Wars on Civilians

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As wars, genocide and atrocities against civilians in various parts of our fragile world escalate and widen, concern for human life, well-being, and safety is intensifying globally.

Professional and learned societies cannot remain indifferent. Organisations whose central remit is healing, and which commit themselves not to “deny individuals or groups access to the material and psychological conditions necessary for optimal human development” (PsySSA Constitution), must respond with care, clarity, and moral resolve. The indiscriminate killing, maiming, and displacement of people across the affected regions cannot be met with silence. We have an obligation to those facing such horrors.

Civilians across these regions are bearing the brunt of contemporary warfare, as the wanton destruction of civilian life and essential infrastructure, including hospitals, educational institutions, places of worship, and other critical sites, erodes the foundations upon which societies sustain life and hope. Such devastation leaves future generations deprived of the conditions necessary for healthy, productive, and meaningful lives. Under the guise of targeting specific groups or military installations, individuals, families, communities, and even nations are being systematically devastated. In recent years, these purported military objectives have inflicted far greater harm on civilian populations than on their declared adversaries.

The wars being waged against civilians, children, women, the elderly, and the displaced reflect a profound disregard for human life. The destruction of institutions dedicated to care, learning, and social development, including schools, universities, and healthcare facilities, represent not only an assault on individuals but also an attack on the social foundations that sustain communities and enable their futures. This destruction does not only wound bodies. The psychological consequences are profound and lasting, affecting individuals, families, and entire communities, and demand urgent attention as part of any meaningful response.



Generations are being marked by trauma, loss, and the destruction of the conditions necessary for human development and a dignified life. These actions undermine any possibility of peace, destroying not only what exists, but what future generations might have inherited.

The Psychological Society of South Africa and the Pan-African Psychology Union therefore call on psychological associations across the world, as well as other professional bodies, to raise a clear and principled voice against the violence being inflicted on civilian populations. We urge adherence to international conventions, the protection of civilian life and essential infrastructure, and commitment to creating the conditions necessary for durable peace. Silence in the face of such devastation is not a neutral position. It is incompatible with the ethical commitments of professions dedicated to protecting life, human dignity and human flourishing. We stand in solidarity with those whose lives, families, and communities are being destroyed, and commit to ensuring that their suffering is neither normalised nor forgotten and justice prevails.

PsySSA and PAPU unreservedly condemn the ongoing violence against civilian populations and the destruction being visited upon their lives, communities, and futures. Global leaders must demonstrate the courage to condemn such ongoing violence against civilians and to act decisively in establishing the political conditions required for a just and lasting peace. So must we.

The Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA)

Pan-African Psychology Union (PAPU)

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