

## **Targeting of healthcare facilities, midwives and other maternity staff during conflicts**

It is an understatement to say that we are living in a time of significant global unrest, with [110 armed conflicts worldwide](#). There are some, like those in Ukraine and Gaza, which receive more attention than others, and upon which the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) is asked for comment. The RCM has made public statements concerning humanitarian disasters associated with conflict, but there has not been a consistent approach to all conflicts. While, over the past three years, we have issued statements on Ukraine and Gaza, we have not commented on the majority of other conflicts.

We recognise that conflict, wherever it occurs, is a hugely emotive issue, both for the wider public and for our members, some of whom will have personal links to the regions concerned. We also recognise that there may be divergent but equally strong views on such issues.

As part of a global profession and as members of the International Confederation of Midwives we advocate for midwives' right to work in safe and enabling environments. We are apolitical which enables us to work effectively with administrations across the UK and its Crown Dependencies.

With all this in mind, the RCM Board has agreed an approach on commenting on international conflicts going forward, so that the College can apply a consistent approach when such matters arise in the future. It is not intended to diminish any of the horrors of any specific conflict, but is a pragmatic approach reflective of our remit and our apolitical stance.

### **The RCM's position is as follows:**

Targeting hospitals and healthcare workers is a violation of international humanitarian law, specifically the Geneva Convention, which protects medical services and personnel in conflict zones.

Conditions for any midwives and maternity staff working in areas of conflict are challenging enough. Healthcare facilities are often targeted for direct attacks, causing injury and death to staff and those they are looking to support and to the loss of vital equipment.

The safety of healthcare workers should never be compromised, and the sanctity of healthcare spaces must be respected by all parties involved in conflict.

The Royal College of Midwives:

- calls for the unequivocal respect for international humanitarian law.
- calls for an end to targeting hospitals and medical centres.
- demands protection for all healthcare workers in conflict zones.
- stands with all midwives and their maternity colleagues in all areas of the world affected by conflict and advocates for their protection.