



NEW YORK MEDICAL COLLEGE

A M E M B E R O F T O U R O U N I V E R S I T Y

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Evangelia Roubou
President ad interim
International Federation of Medical Student Associations

Dear Ms. Roubou:

We write as physicians and educators who are dismayed at the recent action taken on August 9, 2024 by the International Federation of Medical Student Associations (IFMSA) at its annual meeting to suspend the Federation of Israeli Medical Students (FIMS) from participation in the worldwide organization for a period of two years. This would appear to be the first step toward eventual expulsion of Israel from the organization altogether two years hence.

The rationale for the suspension is obscure. The only [press release](#) that the IFMSA has issued regarding the suspension says only that “a motion was proposed by our NMOs [national member organizations] in view of potential violations of the IFMSA Constitution & Bylaws, as well as its Code of Conduct. Due to the dire nature of the allegations against the Federation of Israeli Medical Students (FIMS), which included threats against medical students, online harassment and hate speech, NMOs decided to proceed with a vote for the suspension of FIMS. The IFMSA General Assembly, following a comprehensive and inclusive debate with arguments from all sides, eventually decided that FIMS would be suspended, with two-thirds majority of the present and voting National Member Organizations.” In reality, the vote was not on the original agenda for the meeting, discussion regarding the resolution, which was put forward by the Brazilian national medical student association, was extremely limited, and the Israeli delegation was given only 2 minutes to speak prior to the vote. Although the vote apparently passed by the required 2/3 majority, the votes of individual country delegations were either not recorded or have not been disclosed.

It is notable that apparently no other national delegation has ever been suspended from IFMSA. It seems clear from the timing and rushed nature of this action that the suspension of the Israeli student group was nothing more than a move designed to isolate and ostracize Israeli medical

students, and to punish them for being, well, Israelis. This action is a grave threat to the integrity and purpose of the International Federation of Medical Student Associations.

Israeli medical students are students, not government representatives, and the FIMS is in no way an agent of the Israeli Health Ministry or any other arm of the government of Israel. Regardless of what one thinks of Israel's conflict with Hamas, assuredly its government does not consult with medical students about anything it is doing. To think otherwise is absurd. No national member organization in IFMSA should be held responsible for the actions of its national government.

If anything, the health sector in Israel that its medical students will eventually join as physicians is a place in which Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel interact as colleagues to a greater degree than in most other areas of Israeli society. In that sense, FIMS represents people who are contributing greatly to cooperation and understanding between groups in Israel that are often distant from each other, and the benefit of this should not be underestimated. [Arab citizens of Israel make up over 20% of the physician workforce in Israel](#), and 30% of younger physicians are Arabs. This is notable. (As a contrast for example, in the U.S., Black physicians are only [5.7% of the physician workforce](#), despite bring 12% of the general population.) To ostracize FIMS is to isolate a group that is deeply involved in working across disparate sectors of the society. IFMSA's action sends exactly the wrong message.

We have devoted a substantial portion of our lives to the education of medical students. We find the action of the IFMSA to be shameful and in opposition to the fundamental values of the medical profession—that all lives are of equal value and that physicians must put aside their personal beliefs, politics, prejudices, and allegiances when caring for patients. The first question a physician should ask at the bedside is never “What country are you from?” but always “How can I help you?” IFMSA has lost its way.

Sincerely,

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