Dear Minister Wong,

**Open letter re UN General Assembly resolution for protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations**

The Medical Association for Prevention of War expresses its extreme concern at Australia’s abstention from voting on the UN General Assembly resolution last week titled “Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations”, in relation to the current phase of the war between Israel and Palestine. The resolution condemned “all acts of violence aimed at Palestinian and Israeli civilians”, noted the catastrophic situation in Gaza and set out in a non-partisan fashion the steps needed to address the needs of all parties.

It is reported that Australia failed to support this resolution because Hamas - which committed the horrific and illegal attacks of October 7 that triggered the current phase of the Israel-Palestine war – was not specifically mentioned and condemned. However nor did the resolution mention the Israeli Defence Force which is conducting incessant bombardment of Gaza and destroying civilian infrastructure, and the denial of life’s essentials to the people of Gaza. The focus of the resolution was simply to prevent further suffering and uphold the rule of law. The current urgent issue is not who has done what, but an end to the terror for those trapped in Gaza.

The situation in Gaza is consistently described by aid workers – those who regularly work in disaster and war zones - as the worst they have ever seen. Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the UN Relief and Works Agency describes the “unbearable images of human tragedy”, with thousands of civilians killed, many of them children, and “entire neighbourhoods being flattened over the heads of civilians.”

Mr Lazzarini states that “generations to come will know that we watched this human tragedy unfold….We will not be able to say we did not know. History will ask why the world did not have the courage to act decisively and stop this hell on Earth”.

Generations to come will know that the Australian government did not have the courage, when it was desperately needed, to support this critical UN call for civilians to be protected
and the rule of law to be upheld. Future pronouncements of Australia’s commitment to “the rule of law” will be a cruel reminder that we invoke the rule of law primarily when it can be used against others to bolster our political allegiances. While you have stated that the rule of law must be observed in the current war, such statements have little impact when they are applied in such a partisan fashion as Australia’s abstention last week at the UN indicated.

Australia’s abstention - following the total absence of explicit condemnation by Australia of a single crime committed by Israel in the current war - is a matter of profound, and lasting, shame for our nation. Future Australians and others will ask why Australia, as an ally of Israel, failed so utterly to help stop the unprecedented human catastrophe that has befallen Gaza.

MAPW notes a further danger in the current situation, which adds to our dismay. It is the spreading of this war to neighbouring countries, a process that has already begun, as you have indicated in advising Australians in Lebanon to leave. In addition, there remains the risk of use of nuclear weapons, of which Israel – alone among Middle East nations - has approximately 90. Any use of these most destructive of all weapons would take the current nightmare to a whole new level. It is this ever-present risk that makes the delegitimising and elimination of all nuclear weapons an urgent humanitarian imperative. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is the only global initiative that is heading in that direction, and we again call on the Australian government to sign it.

In 2003 a previous Australian government supported the illegal invasion of Iraq in the “war on terror”, which paved the way for decades of instability and bloodshed in the Middle East. Now, as then, violence will bring further violence. Notions of destroying Hamas are fanciful while the destruction of Gaza breeds yet another generation of hostility and fighting.

Given Australia’s failure to support the UN call for an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce, as set out in the recent resolution, could you please set out Australia’s plan whereby this war can be brought to an end before further catastrophe mounts upon existing catastrophe.

Yours sincerely

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President, Medical Association for Prevention of War