

## EDITORIAL

# Free Speech, the Right to Health, and Genocide

JOSEPH J. AMON

### Introduction

The right to health is not usually realized through the benevolence of governments as much as the demands of populations. A critical part of those demands is manifest through the exercise of free speech: presenting evidence and demanding accountability.

In Zimbabwe in 2006, with my colleague Tiseke Kasambala, I interviewed more than 100 people living with HIV and more than 30 individuals from local and international nongovernmental organizations. We also interviewed local health experts, doctors and medical officials from private clinics and mission hospitals, government-appointed provincial and district AIDS coordinators, and representatives from the National AIDS Council.<sup>1</sup>

At the time, Zimbabwe had a growing HIV epidemic and few people receiving antiretroviral medicines. To quell dissent, the Mugabe government restricted freedom of speech and assembly. As dictators do, President Mugabe chose a dramatic moment to clamp down: on World AIDS Day.

HIV activists had organized demonstrations in the capital, Harare, to focus attention on the need for greater budget transparency and accountability. Although the demonstrators had a permit to march—the result of a judicial ruling allowing the protests—the police arrested five HIV activists under the Public Order and Security Act and charged them with incitement. Commenting on the arrests, one activist told us, “Because of the arrests, it will be difficult to get people to attend future marches or protests to advocate for their rights.”

Exactly the point of the government and police attacks.

Clashes between free speech and the right to health were also seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, Human Rights Watch found that 83 countries had used the pandemic to justify violating the exercise of free speech and peaceful assembly.<sup>2</sup> One case the organization highlighted was that of Zhang Zhan, a 37-year-old journalist, who was sentenced to four years in prison by a Shanghai court for “picking quarrels

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and provoking trouble” by traveling to Wuhan and reporting on the coronavirus outbreak. In Ecuador, security forces beat and injured protesters demanding guidance for handling the bodies of people suspected of having died from COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, at US colleges and universities, protests have erupted over Israel’s attacks on Gaza in response to Hamas’s terrorist attack on Israel. While these protests are not about the right to health in the United States, they are very much about human rights and health.

## Protecting free speech, addressing hate speech

As I noted in these pages in my last editorial, “threats to the right to health—and the full realization of all rights—are acute whenever countries face or create conflict.”<sup>4</sup> Accompanying conflict comes restrictions on free speech and, often, attacks on health workers who are perceived as partisan. Targeting health workers can be a way of silencing individuals who are witnesses to both vast destruction and individual persecution, including torture.

Of course, health workers are only one common target. Students, professors, and journalists are also frequently targeted—again, with the goal of shutting down speech and protest. However, academic freedom, free speech, and the freedom of the press are key tools that enshrine the right to question and criticize government policies and actions, whether it is based on fundamental principles or scientific evidence.

Universities in the United States, and globally, have often recognized, and even encouraged, students to engage in the right to speech, designating debating corners on campus or putting up with sit-ins, teach-ins, and marches that (minimally) disrupt campus operations.

Despite this history, and despite a long history of the US Supreme Court defending academic freedom, universities in the United States have recently been put under enormous pressure to restrict speech and protest, especially when it is directed against Israeli policies and military attacks on Palestine.<sup>5</sup> At Harvard, for example, the Trump administration

threatened to withhold US\$9 billion in research funding unless the University accepted external “audits” of academic programs, students, faculty, staff, and leadership for “viewpoint diversity,” as well as changes to the University’s admissions process, governance structure, and hiring practices.<sup>6</sup>

The demands also included reform of Harvard’s Divinity School, Graduate School of Education, School of Public Health, Medical School, Religion and Public Life Program, FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, and International Human Rights Clinic, all of which were alleged to “fuel antisemitic harassment or reflect ideological capture.”<sup>7</sup>

Harvard’s president responded to the demands by saying that “the University will not surrender its independence or relinquish its constitutional rights.”<sup>8</sup> In turn, the Trump administration froze US\$2.2 billion in funding and threatened to withhold the University’s tax exempt status and to block Harvard from enrolling international students.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, Harvard is not the only university that has been targeted—the Trump administration sees nearly all universities as adversaries. Vice President JD Vance, in a 2021 speech, laid out the case for attacking universities, referring to them as “hostile institutions.”<sup>10</sup> He closed his speech, to much applause, by quoting former President Nixon that “the professors are the enemy.”

This is not the first time universities have been criticized. At the founding of Johns Hopkins University, where I now sit, Thomas Henry Huxley’s inaugural speech was criticized for not opening with a prayer or closing with a benediction.<sup>11</sup> Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter referenced this speech in *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, a case central to contemporary issues of academic freedom and free speech, saying that “a university ceases to be true to its own nature if it becomes the tool of church or state or any sectional interest.”<sup>12</sup> In his plurality opinion for the court, Chief Justice Earl Warren said that “to impose any strait jacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of our nation.”<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, the Trump administration's attack on universities is ongoing. It is both financial and political, and it should not be considered a coincidence that human rights programs are overrepresented in the list above: calling out and standing up for human rights can put a target on your back.

Universities undoubtedly have an obligation to protect students from physical assault, harassment, and discrimination. They also have clear obligations not to interfere with academic freedom and speech. The suggestion, though, that *any criticism* of Israel is antisemitism can put these obligations at odds with each other. For example, in early 2024, a complaint was filed with the US Department of Education by the editor-in-chief of the online media platform Campus Reform, a source that describes itself as a “conservative watchdog in the nation’s higher education system.”<sup>14</sup> Johns Hopkins was only one of at least two dozen universities that the editor-in-chief filed complaints against.<sup>15</sup> The complaint “referred to a news article describing a letter” signed by Johns Hopkins faculty, allegedly “expressing solidarity with the people of Gaza and demanding an immediate ceasefire.”<sup>16</sup> In his complaint, the editor-in-chief said that “this praise is indicative of an environment that is hostile and unsafe for Jewish students.” There is no indication, however, that he spoke directly with any Johns Hopkins students.<sup>17</sup>

Other complaints filed directly with the university more clearly point to acts of antisemitism and harassment, although not always discernably linked to individuals associated with the University (such as anonymous social media posts and vandalism). The Department of Education’s investigation found that in every case, university staff offered to meet with the individual filing a complaint and to provide information on university policy and supportive resources.

Complaints were also filed by students reporting harassment related to Arab and Palestinian people and cultural practices. For example, a student reported that his supervisor told him not to wear his keffiyeh (traditional Palestinian head scarf) to work because “it symbolized terrorism,

hate and bad people.”<sup>18</sup> Students also filed a complaint against a professor who called Palestinians “barbaric animals” and “blood thirsty morally depraved animals.”<sup>19</sup>

## Antisemitism within US medical schools, health care institutions—and public health journals?

Increasing rates of antisemitism have also been alleged in medical schools, health care settings, and public health journals. Unlike the individual complaints above, these claims—made by scholars—allege systematic bias. But how good is the evidence?

In one study, two researchers examined videos of commencement ceremonies at 25 US medical schools for evidence of antisemitism, which the authors defined as wearing keffiyehs (defined by the authors as symbols associated with political violence and support of terrorism), Palestinian flags, and “banners, buttons, and signs” calling for divestment or proclaiming “occupation is a health crisis” or “stop bombing hospitals.”<sup>20</sup> They found that 2.5% of graduates wore “offensive stoles” or keffiyehs and 1.7% carried banners or signs, wore buttons, or protested “verbally.” Of course, wearing a keffiyeh or including a Palestinian flag on a graduation stole is not antisemitism, just as wearing a Chicago Bulls hat is not evidence of being a gang member.<sup>21</sup> While the researchers state that they recorded the number of students wearing stoles with flags of any country, they do not report this data.

Other published articles similarly stretch definitions of antisemitism and use questionable methods to investigate alleged experiences of antisemitism. For example, a December 2024 article published in the *Journal of Religion and Health* alleged increasing antisemitism, including in health-related academic journals.<sup>22</sup> The evidence came primarily from social media posts and the results of a survey distributed through four Jewish medical associations.

Unfortunately, the article has serious flaws in its methods and analysis. For example, the authors state that they conducted systematic reviews

of journal articles published between 2000 and 2023 by searching for the terms “antisemitism,” “antisemitic,” and “Holocaust” within titles and abstracts. The authors found a tenfold increase in publications. It is unclear whether this is a positive or negative outcome.

The authors also examined nearly 900,000 X posts from 220,405 self-identified health care professionals published between January 1, 2020, and April 1, 2024. The authors state that individual accounts were identified using a proprietary algorithm and that posts were selected based on “a proprietary query built of keywords and phrases related to the topic of antisemitism while carefully excluding any tagged conversations which were deemed irrelevant to the topic.” In their presentation of the results, the authors report that “conversations” about antisemitism increased fivefold.

They conclude that these findings “might reflect increased antisemitism within the health-care community.” However, the combination of proprietary algorithms and lack of specific information on the number of “conversations” (and not just the scale of increase) makes their analysis of social media unclear and not subject to review and confirmation. The authors’ suggestion that a greater increase in social media posts including the term “Gaza” compared to “Holocaust” suggests increased antisemitism is puzzling, and the use of terms such as “WHO” (for World Health Organization) and “mafia” as part of their search strategy is inexplicable.

The most specific evidence the authors present for their claim of “escalating antisemitism within the United States healthcare community” is drawn from an online survey completed by 170 “Jewish-identifying healthcare students and professionals.” The authors acknowledge that this is not a representative sample.

Although the survey did not ask respondents to identify specific medical or scientific publications that they felt were antisemitic, the authors state that respondents did so in the free-text section of the survey, which asked for “comments or experiences.” The authors then mischaracterize each of the articles identified.

For example, they claim that a number of articles say that Israeli and/or Jewish health professionals practice organ harvesting, withhold medical care from Palestinian Arabs, and deliberately target Palestinian health care workers and/or ambulances. They also cite a short oral testimony by Salam (a pseudonym) published in 2024 in *The Lancet* as “using Nazi imagery.”

None of these claims is true. None of the articles mention organ harvesting.

Some of the articles discuss Israeli government policies that limit access to health care, and some mention the Israeli military targeting health care workers or ambulances, but there is no mention of Israeli or Jewish health professionals doing so.

The claim that a letter published in *The Lancet*, entitled “There Is No Way to Leave Gaza,” uses Nazi imagery is also false. Salam’s letter is a firsthand account of life in Gaza and describes a precarious daily existence alongside personal experience of loss. The letter begins:

*On Oct 8, the second day of the ongoing aggression in the Gaza Strip, my father was supposed to have his chemotherapy diffuser pump removed at a local hospital in Gaza. Yet, due to the escalating danger, I had to remove it myself as I followed his doctor’s instructions over the phone.*

It ends with:

*Two of my friends lost their homes and have sought refuge in a hospital. That hospital has been threatened with bombardment, but they have nowhere else to go. Despite all this, I am one of the lucky few with a roof overhead and a bathroom shared with only 20 other people.<sup>23</sup>*

## Politicizing scientific publications and politicized peer review

Ordinarily, peer review provides a process for addressing methodological flaws, the mischaracterization of cited works, and the soundness of research findings and conclusions.

However, peer reviewers are not always objective. Shortly after the second article mentioned above was published in December 2024, I submit-

ted a response to the journal that pointed out the obvious errors in the article. Several rounds of reviews of my response followed. Some were helpful, and some were outraged by my critique.

One reviewer insisted that Salam's use of the term "concentration camp" to describe Gaza was in fact Nazi imagery and that, besides, Salam, in their 750-word account, should have condemned the October 7 attack by Hamas before recounting their personal experience. It made me wonder what a better term might be to describe mass detention, inhumane living conditions, dehumanization, violence and psychological torture, and complete isolation from accountability. It also made me wonder whether a victim of the US bombing of Hiroshima would be asked to first criticize the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Another reviewer suggested that my response to the article was based on neither methodology nor fact but was an "emotional reaction."

As the editor-in-chief of *Health and Human Rights*, I see nearly all peer reviewers' comments for our journal articles. It educates me, but it is also my role to ensure that the reviews are accurate and fair and that our peer reviewers have diverse expertise.

It worries me, though, that scientific journals are coming under attack alongside universities. The Trump administration has forced the withdrawal of scientific manuscripts co-written by government employees; and journal authors, worried about backlash and defunding, have asked to submit papers with pseudonyms. This is not how science should work.

According to a recent article in the health news service STAT, the Trump administration has also begun targeting specific scientific journals. A letter sent by the interim US attorney for the District of Columbia to the editor-in-chief of *CHEST* (published by the American College of Chest Physicians) stated that "it has been brought to my attention that more and more journals and publications like *CHEST* Journal are conceding that they are partisans in various scientific debates."<sup>24</sup> Language in the letter alluded to fraud regulation and postal codes, suggesting possible prosecution. The *New England Journal of Medicine* and the jour-

nal *Obstetrics and Gynecology* have also received letters.

These attacks should come as no surprise. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., before being approved as secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, said that in his first week in office, he would

*call in all of the scientific journals and ... say to them ... you've been lying to the public, you are representing yourself as a neutral and reliable source of health information, and you have done tremendous damage ... you are publishing fake science ... and I am going to litigate against you under the racketeering laws, under the general tort laws; I am going to find a way to sue you.*<sup>25</sup>

The Trump administration has also targeted members of National Institutes of Health science review boards, firing 43 experts—nearly 90% of whom were women, Black, or Hispanic. None was given a reason for their early dismissal from five-year terms.<sup>26</sup>

## Targeting DEI and weaponizing viewpoint diversity

The weaponization of viewpoint diversity is similar to past efforts to demand "equal time" for creationism, but goes much further, using the power of the state to silence some views and shift money to ideological fellow travelers. It is consistent with the Trump administration's attitude of impunity—ignoring the courts, firing military lawyers and whistleblowers, threatening media outlets, and extorting protection money (e.g., pro bono legal work for partisan causes). But viewpoint diversity does not actually mean that the Trump administration will allow diverse viewpoints: Trump has disappeared lawful residents to overseas prisons, banned transgender individuals from military service, and imposed restrictions on the genders they can use on US passports—efforts to punish and silence.

Much of these efforts have been conducted through executive orders targeting "DEI" (diversity, equity, and inclusion) and leaving no clear sense of which words, phrases, or ideas will result in a de-



nial of funding or some other punishment.<sup>27</sup> Part of the Trump administration's attack on speech, and truth, is the closing down of the Voice of America, which was founded with the mission to counter Nazi propaganda with accurate and unbiased news.

Another example of attacks on speech is the deportation proceedings against international students, with little due process. Columbia University student Mahmoud Khalil, who was a negotiator for Columbia students during talks with university officials, has been disappeared to a prison in Louisiana. Rumeysa Ozturk, a 30-year-old Turkish student, was picked up off the street for writing an op-ed in a student newspaper, despite the fact that the State Department found no evidence that she engaged in antisemitic activities or made public statements supporting Hamas.<sup>28</sup> Yunseo Chung, a lawful US resident who moved to the United States as a child, was deported after being arrested at a sit-in at Barnard College. Rasha Alawieh, a kidney transplant specialist from Lebanon, was deported even though a federal judge ordered that she not be removed until a hearing could be held. Momodou Taal, a doctoral student at Cornell University, had his visa revoked after he participated in campus demonstrations. Taal self-deported, saying that "I have lost faith I could walk the streets without being abducted." Mohsen Mahdawi, a Palestinian and a Buddhist, was detained even though he sought to build dialogue with Jewish students and spoke at churches, synagogues, and colleges, "extolling empathy as the key to a resolution" in the Middle East.<sup>29</sup> As of mid-April 2025, almost 1,000 international students and scholars at universities across the country had lost their legal status, according to the Association of International Educators.<sup>30</sup>

## Violations of the right to health, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide

There is a simple reason for the Trump administration to restrict speech and assembly and to crack down on universities and faculty. Silencing debate about Gaza—a conflict where violations of the right to health are occurring, where war crimes have been

committed, and where crimes against humanity and acts of genocide are ongoing—is prelude and practice for silencing debate at home.

### *Violations of the right to health*

As a scholar and as the editor-in-chief of this journal, I feel an obligation to speak out about Israel's violations of the right to health in Gaza, including decimating the health care system; limiting access to health services as a punitive measure; directly attacking patients, medical personnel, health facilities, and ambulances; and threatening or restricting access to the underlying determinants of health.<sup>31</sup>

**Decimating the health care system.** Attacks on health began immediately after Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. By April 6, 2024, Israeli defense forces had destroyed 26 hospitals.<sup>32</sup> In September 2024, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that "every single hospital in Gaza has been affected, and no hospital remains fully functioning," and that "the healthcare system is now close to collapse."<sup>33</sup> WHO also declared that "the systematic dismantling of healthcare must end."<sup>34</sup> This systematic destruction of Gaza's health care system was described by scholars Neve Gordon and Nicola Perugini as "medical lawfare," ultimately resulting in "medicide."<sup>35</sup>

**Limiting access to health services as a punitive measure.** On April 7, 2025, the heads of six UN agencies—the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the World Food Programme, and WHO—issued a joint statement saying that "we are witnessing acts of war in Gaza that show an utter disregard for human life."<sup>36</sup> More than two million people were trapped at crossing points, with humanitarian supplies such as food, medicine, fuel, and shelter items unable to reach those in need.

Two weeks earlier, the head of WHO posted on social media that 50 health workers and 143 patients had been kept in one building at Al-Shifa Hospital with extremely limited food and water

and only one nonfunctional toilet. Patients were in critical condition and lacked access to basic medical supplies and medicines; two patients who were on life support died due to a lack of electricity.<sup>37</sup>

**Directly attacking patients, medical personnel, health facilities, and ambulances.** Between October 2023 and March 2025, 1,813 incidents of violence against or obstruction of access to health care in Gaza were reported.<sup>38</sup> Health facilities were damaged 353 times, at least 624 health workers were killed, and 351 health workers were arrested by Israeli forces. In some cases, staff were prevented from providing care to their patients; in other cases, Israeli forces unlawfully evacuated hospitals and interfered with the treatment of wounded and sick patients, including denying medical workers access to medicines and supplies.<sup>39</sup>

Over the course of five days in March 2025:

- The Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital and an adjacent medical school were demolished by Israeli forces, who claimed that the hospital was being used by Hamas. The hospital was the only specialized cancer hospital in Gaza.<sup>40</sup> The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the “deliberate” destruction as “part of Israel’s policy aimed at rendering Gaza uninhabitable and forcibly displacing the Palestinian people.”
- Fifteen Palestinian paramedics and rescue workers were killed by Israeli forces. An investigation revealed that the emergency responders were shot “one by one” and their bodies gathered and buried in a mass grave, along with their ambulance and a United Nations (UN) vehicle that had accompanied the medics. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said that the Israel Defense Forces had impeded the collection of the bodies for several days.<sup>41</sup> The same day, two paramedics were killed after their ambulance was shot at by Israeli forces, and an Israeli military attack on Nasser Hospital, the largest hospital in southern Gaza, killed two people, injured several, and sparked a large fire.<sup>42</sup> The attack hit the surgical building of the hospital. Among those killed was a 16-year-old boy who had undergone surgery two days earlier.
- An office of the International Red Cross was shelled by an Israeli military tank despite being clearly marked.<sup>43</sup>
- The Israeli Defense Forces assaulted medics from the Palestinian Red Crescent Society as they tried to treat injured Palestinians and caused damage to at least one ambulance before confiscating its keys.<sup>44</sup>

These attacks represent, at a minimum, willful disregard for international humanitarian law and the lives of Palestinian health professionals.

**Threatening or restricting access to the underlying determinants of health.** Since October 2023, Israeli authorities have deliberately obstructed Palestinians’ access to food and water. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri, stated in March 2024 that “Israel has mounted a starvation campaign against the Palestinian people in Gaza.”<sup>45</sup> In July, Fakhri said that Israel has used starvation with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Palestinian people.<sup>46</sup>

Israeli forces have also attacked and destroyed water and sanitation infrastructure, including wastewater treatment plants. On January 24, 2024, the UN reported that 87% of water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities in Gaza Governorate were either destroyed or damaged.<sup>47</sup> Between October 2023 and July 2024, Palestinians in Gaza had access to an average of between 2 and 9 liters of water per day—well below the minimum emergency humanitarian standards of 15 liters per capita per day recommended by WHO.<sup>48</sup>

From October 2023 to August 2024, municipalities in northern Gaza and Gaza City reported the destruction of 97 water wells, 13 major sewage pumps, 57 generators used for wells, 204 waste collection vehicles, and 255,000 meters of water and sewage lines.<sup>49</sup>

This destruction goes far beyond restricting access to the determinants of health: it involves the leveling of entire neighborhoods and the destruc-

tion of farms, schools, universities, businesses, places of worship, cemeteries, cultural and archaeological sites, government buildings, water and sanitation facilities, hospitals, and clinics. This can only be seen as a campaign to erase and eradicate Palestinian physical and cultural existence in Gaza entirely.

### *Allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide*

Following Hamas's attack on Israel, statements from Israeli government officials echoed Nazi statements about Jews 80 years ago: "Human animals must be treated as such. There will be no electricity and no water, there will only be destruction. You wanted hell, you will get hell" (Major General Ghassan Alian).<sup>50</sup> "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we act accordingly" (Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant).<sup>51</sup> "Gaza will become a place where no human being can exist" (retired Major General Giora Eiland).<sup>52</sup> Trump has cheered on these calls and proposed that the United States "take over" and "own" the Gaza Strip and send Palestinians into exile in other countries.<sup>53</sup>

In November 2024, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Gallant, as well as Mohammed Diab Ibrahim al-Masri, commander-in-chief of Hamas's military wing.<sup>54</sup> The court's judges concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that all three men were responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Specific charges against Netanyahu and Gallant included the starvation of civilians, intentionally directing attacks against civilians, murder, and persecution. Charges against al-Masri included murder and hostage-taking. Israel's blockade of Gaza and interference with humanitarian assistance can be considered collective punishment of the civilian population, also a war crime.<sup>55</sup>

In a series of rulings from 2024, the International Court of Justice ordered that Israel prevent genocide against Palestinians and "take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of

urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip."<sup>56</sup>

Israel has denied seeking to commit genocide, stating that "it acted with the intention to defend itself, to terminate the threats against it and to rescue the hostages."<sup>57</sup> Israel's collective punishment and racist narratives about Palestinians, not to mention the more than 50,000 dead and wholesale destruction, belie the idea that Israel was merely acting in self-defense.<sup>58</sup>

Human rights organizations have alleged that Israel's deliberate attacks on access to water in Gaza and its restrictions on access to humanitarian assistance constitute the crime against humanity of extermination and acts of genocide.<sup>59</sup> In March 2024, Francesca Albanese, the UN's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, released a report concluding that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating that Israel has committed genocide has been met."<sup>60</sup>

In April 2025, Albanese, alongside UN Special Rapporteurs on the right to health, the right to a healthy environment, the rights of internally displaced persons, the right to freedom of assembly and association, the rights of persons with disabilities, the right to education, and the right to adequate housing, among other UN officials, released a statement that Israel's actions in Gaza are leading to the "destruction of Palestinian life."<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

In 1948, in the aftermath of World War II, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set out fundamental human rights. The preamble begins by saying that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."<sup>62</sup> The declaration is sometimes critiqued as aspirational. It is important, though, to have aspirations.

Suzanne Nossel, former CEO of PEN America, recently wrote, "Rooting out antisemitism will ultimately depend not just on enforcing rules or



applying pressure. It will demand defending threatened principles of openness, respect for differences, compassion and solidarity. These are principles that undergird American society, and the place of Jews within it.”<sup>63</sup> The same is true globally, wherever there is hate, discrimination, and senseless attacks.

Twenty years after the Rwandan genocide, Stewart Patrick and Patrick McCormick published an article on the Council on Foreign Relations website about key lessons of the genocide.<sup>64</sup> But a more personal view was expressed by Freddy Mutanguha, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide who has spoken about the importance of testimony as a part of healing: “Testimony is important for many reasons. We need to speak to release our anger; to process our experience, and reduce the trauma; to honour the memory of our murdered loved ones and community; to secure a measure of justice, and to begin the long road to peace and reconciliation.”<sup>65</sup> These are lessons broader than just the Rwandan genocide: attacks on free speech are attacks on remembering—and healing.

In a recent interview, Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz noted that “what makes for good societies, for good economies” is democracy. He continued:

*An essential part of democracies is free media and strong universities. Strong universities are important because they provide the critique, to evaluate what governments are doing, to ascertain when there's an encroachment on democracies, to criticize it when they are doing things that are against the interests of people, when there are conflicts of interest. That's why anti-democratic forces always begin the attack on the media and on universities.*<sup>66</sup>

There is no way forward without looking back, remembering, recentering the importance of human rights, and seeking understanding and peace across differences and divides.

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