

October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023

To: Philip D. Greenberg, MD, FAACR  
President, AACR

Margaret Foti, PhD, MD (hc)  
Chief Executive Officer, AACR

Dear Drs. Foti and Greenberg,

We wish to respond to the email sent by AACR leadership on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, titled “**We Stand in Solidarity with all Those Affected by the Crisis in the Middle East.**”

This email was sent following a letter addressed to you by the Israeli Society for Cancer Research (ISCR), dated October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023. While you expressed your sadness and sympathy for “all those who have lost loved ones or who have been otherwise impacted by the violence” (which of course is an expected humane reaction), we do wish to convey our disappointment regarding what was omitted from your statement and to voice our deep concerns pertaining to the following points:

1. We found the wording of the letter, which generally discusses “violence in the Middle East”, to be somewhat disconnected from the reality and as such, hurtful. The letter did not include a clear and simple statement condemning the October 7<sup>th</sup> massacre. Taking a clear moral stand against brutal terrorism has nothing to do with politics, or with offering sympathy to all innocent victims. While the AACR message aims to offer solidarity, it bluntly fails to acknowledge the atrocities and their perpetrators. For example, the words “*Hamas*,” “*Islamic Jihad*” or “*terror attack*” are not even included in the letter, nor is the tragic fact that at least 220 people, of all ages and of various nationalities and religious beliefs, were illegally abducted from their homes and are being held as hostages in Gaza. Your letter reads as if no one is responsible for the current “humanitarian crisis” mentioned in your message.

On October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, over 1,400 Israelis were brutally murdered by Hamas terrorists. Relative to the population size, the murder of 1,400 people in one day in Israel is analogous to the unbelievable number of around 50,000 people in the USA, and the 220 captives are tantamount to over 7,000 Americans. Some of the victims were not only slayed, but were also tortured, mutilated, raped, burnt alive, decapitated, their houses looted and burnt to the ground. Even dogs were not spared. In some instances, the murderers publicly executed the civilians and posted their executions on the victims’ own social media platforms, so their own relatives had to witness their horrific deaths. The brutality is beyond what words can describe and the evidence is overwhelming. This was an *offensive attack of monstrous dimensions*, carefully planned and sadistically executed. These are crimes against humanity, which have nothing to do with a Palestinian fight for freedom or with the territorial conflict(s) in the Middle East. Framing this as yet another round of violence, or yet another “crisis in the Middle East”, is a very ill-judged wording that diminishes the gravity of the attack and disparages its victims. Following 9/11, how would you react to a statement that laments “the sad crash of a few airplanes into some buildings” or a message of sympathy to “all those affected by the unfolding violence between the U.S. and Al-Qaeda”?

2. In addition to the hundreds of murder victims and the thousands of injured people, at least 220 civilians and soldiers were kidnapped, **among them cancer patients** and about 30 children. This was not mentioned at all in your letter. Below are pictures and names of some of the kidnapped children:



Please take a look at these faces. Some of these children are in fact orphans as their parents were murdered in the attack, and some of these kids were forced to watch this. Thomas Hand, the father of 8-year-old Emily, described to CNN the sense of relief (!) he felt when he learned his daughter had been murdered, rather than abducted to Gaza as he had feared. Compared to Hamas captivity, he said, "death was a blessing, an absolute blessing (<https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2023/10/11/israel-father-reaction-daughter-killed-kibbutz-hamas-attack-clarissa-ward-dnt-nn-vpx.cnn>). Why does your statement not even call for the **immediate release** of those poor children and the other hostages?

3. We wish to address the subject of cancer patients and cancer care. In your email you stated: *"We call upon every member of the AACR and the global cancer community to consider how each of us can extend a helping hand as well as share our knowledge and experience with health care professionals in the Middle East who are battling the concurrent challenges of cancer and the crisis."* To us, this wording sounds, once again, quite hollow. You may be unaware of the fact that there are **cancer patients held hostage in Gaza**. Exact information is scarce and incomplete, but we know of several breast cancer patients, a patient recovering from meningioma, and one other patient being treated with chemotherapy (*personal communication, Prof. Hagai Levine, head of Medical Team, Hostages and Missing Families Forum*). Needless to say, they are in all likelihood **not being treated for their illness**. If the AACR truly wants to extend a helping hand – you might want to start here. In contrast to the "balanced" statement regarding all cancer patients who suffer from the "humanitarian crisis in the Middle East," in fact there is no symmetry here at all. Let us also remind you that **Palestinian cancer patients from Gaza and the West Bank are routinely treated in Israeli hospitals, out of kindness and humane conduct**. In the past decade, over **500 Palestinian patients per year**, including children (hemato-oncologic patients), mainly from Gaza but also from the West Bank, were treated in hospitals throughout Israel. Some Israeli hospitals even train Palestinian oncologists from the West Bank. Lastly, we would like to stress the chilling fact that several Israeli hostages are known to be human rights and peace activists, and **even used to drive Palestinian cancer patients** – at their own expense, out of human solidarity – from Gaza into Israel, for the purpose of cancer treatments.

4. We would like to point out that in the past, in other global conflicts, the AACR did not shy away from a clear moral standing. See for example the AACR Statement on the Russian Invasion of Ukraine and the Threat to Cancer Patients and Research, given on March 4<sup>th</sup> 2022 (<https://www.aacr.org/about-the-aacr/newsroom/news-releases/aacr-statement-on-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-and-the-threat-to-cancer-patients-and-research/>). In that statement, there were no “two sides” and no general “crisis in Eastern Europe” but a clear condemnation of Russia. That statement reads: *“As the world’s first and largest organization dedicated to accelerating advances against cancer, the AACR and its more than 50,000 members from around the world stand in solidarity with the citizens of Ukraine during the Russian attack on their country. Ukrainian cancer patients of all ages are vulnerable especially at this time while their care is interrupted by acts of war, criminal attacks on medical facilities, and dwindling food and supplies.”* The AACR was also very clear in its statements about the grave consequence of the 9/11 attack on cancer patients (e.g., <https://www.aacr.org/patients-caregivers/progress-against-cancer/understanding-911-responders-prostate-cancer-risk/>). Why is it then that when Israelis are victims of one of the most horrific terror attacks the world has ever known, the AACR fails to speak up with a clear moral voice? Our opinion is that your insisting on a “balanced” response that does not name or blame anyone, is dishonest and lacks moral stance.
5. We would like to emphasize that we, as cancer caregivers and scientists who are engaged in a battle against pain and suffering, we acknowledge the suffering of civilians in Gaza. We are fully aware and deeply care about this suffering, and as mentioned above – many of us treat cancer patients from Gaza on a daily basis, and others train Palestinian students and oncologists in our labs and hospitals. We want to stress that we are all deeply troubled by the tragic loss of lives of innocent civilians both in Israel and in Gaza. But ignoring the immediate context of this suffering and refraining from taking a clear stand on the despicable attack on Israel by the terrorist organization Hamas, does not do justice to the victims on either side.

In sum, your avoidance of clearly condemning a vicious terror attack is shameful. We honestly feel that your letter fails to demonstrate your solidarity with your (many) Israeli colleagues and with the broader Jewish community. It also lacks the basic common sense and moral sensitivity of acknowledging the monstrous terror attack that took place (and is still unfolding), which has unfortunately led and keeps leading to the loss of thousands of Israeli and Palestinian lives. A “balanced response” unconsciously or consciously puts us on an equal moral ground with Hamas with regard to the human suffering caused by the recent events. This is a false and hurtful assertion.

Nevertheless, we still believe that it is not too late to correct it.

Many scientific and medical societies published clear and thoughtful statements of solidarity. Please join them and stand with the cancer community in Israel. To quote the NYC mayor, Eric Adams: **“We are not alright”**.

Respectfully,  
The Israeli cancer research and cancer treatment community

Signed by: