
WMA STATEMENT ON WEAPONS OF WARFARE AND THEIR RELATION TO LIFE AND HEALTH

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PREAMBLE

1. When nations enter into warfare or into weapons development, they do not usually consider the effects of the use of weapons on the health of individual non-combatants and on public health in general, either in the short or in the longer term.
2. Nevertheless the medical profession is required to deal with both the immediate and long term health effects of warfare, and in particular with the effects of different forms of weapons.
3. The potential for scientific and medical knowledge to contribute to the development of new weapons systems, targeted against specific individuals, specific populations or against body systems, is considerable. This includes the development of weapons designed to target anatomical or physiological systems, including vision, or which use knowledge of human genetic similarities and differences to target weapons.
4. There are no current and commonly used criteria to measure weapons effects on health. International Humanitarian Law states that weapons that cause injuries which would constitute "unnecessary suffering or superfluous injury" are illegal. These terms are not defined and require interpretation against objective criteria for the law to be effective.
5. Physicians can aid in developing criteria for weapons that cause injury or suffering so extreme as to invoke the terms of International Humanitarian Law.
6. Such criteria could aid lawyers in the use of International Humanitarian Law, allow assessment of the legality of new weapons currently in development against an agreed, objective system of assessment of their medical effects, and identify breaches of the Law once it is developed.
7. Physician involvement in the delineation of such objective criteria is essential if it is to become part of the legal process. However, it should be recognised that physicians are opposed to any use of weapons against human beings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The WMA believes that the development, manufacture and sale of weapons for use against human beings are abhorrent. To support the prevention and reduction of weapons injuries the WMA:
 - a. Supports international efforts to define objective criteria to measure the effects of current and future weapons, which could be used to stop the development, manufacture, sale and use of those weapons;
 - b. Calls on National Medical Associations to urge national governments to cooperate with the collection of such data as are necessary for establishing objective criteria;
 - c. Calls on National Medical Associations to support and encourage research into the global public health effects of weapons use, and to publicise the results of that research both nationally and internationally to ensure that both the public and governments are aware of the long term health consequences of weapons use on non-combatant individuals and populations.

RESCINDED