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Michael Goldfarb: Doctors Without Borders must confront its ideological blind spots

The organization has met the low bar of condemning October 7, but I have not seen it call Hamas to account in even the mildest terms

By **Michael Goldfarb**, Special to National Post
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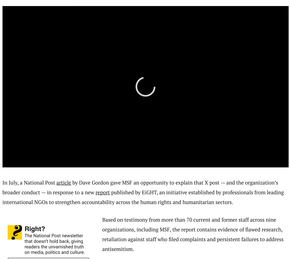


A man who was shot in his leg during protests at the Gaza/Israel border fence enters a medical clinic operated by Medecins Sans Frontieres/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) on May 13, 2018 in Gaza City, Gaza. PHOTO BY SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

On Oct. 17, 2025, immediately following a deadly explosion in the parking lot at Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) posted a statement on X unequivocally blaming Israel for a "massacre."

Satellite imagery, intelligence assessments and forensic evidence and media investigations swiftly pointed to strong evidence that an errant Hamas or Islamic Jihad rocket was the cause. Yet nearly three years later, MSF's accusation remains online.

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In July, a National Post article by Dave Gordon gave MSF an opportunity to explain that X post — and the organization's broader conduct — in response to a new report published by EiGHT, an initiative established by professionals from leading international NGOs to strengthen accountability across the human rights and humanitarian sectors.

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Based on testimony from more than 70 current and former staff across nine organizations, including MSF, the report contains evidence of flawed research, retaliation against staff who filed complaints and persistent failures to address antisemitism.

As a former long-time MSF-USA employee, and a co-founder of EiGHT, I believe MSF squandered an opportunity to demonstrate accountability.

Responding to Gordon, MSF acknowledged that it "is not an investigative body and cannot determine responsibility" for the Al-Ahli explosion. So why did the organization categorically accuse Israel before evidence emerged? And why won't it remove the post?

MSF's public voice is ostensibly guided by its principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality, as well as its commitment to témoignage — bearing direct witness to human suffering and speaking hard truths.

Israel is certainly not beyond reproach, and MSF has appropriately documented the devastating humanitarian consequences of its military campaign. It has legitimacy to cite violations of international humanitarian law. But only if it tells the full truth.

While MSF met the low bar of condemning the October 7 attacks in an online FAQ, I am not aware of statements where it has forcefully called on Hamas to cease deliberately endangering civilians by militarizing hospitals or using private homes as firing positions, among myriad other violations. Indeed, I am not aware of any statements where it has called Hamas to account in even the mildest terms.

More alarming is MSF's treatment of Jewish staff members.

I witnessed — and was the target of — antisemitic remarks, tropes and insinuations at headquarter offices and in the field. Colleagues who knew I'm Jewish told me to my face that Israel had no right to exist. As at many NGOs referenced in the EiGHT report, denial of millennia of Jewish history and Israel's legitimacy appears prevalent with some within those organizations.

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Since the Hamas massacres on Oct. 7, 2023, criticism of Israel within MSF has transcended necessary and legitimate political discourse to open expressions of unhinged anti-Zionism indistinguishable from antisemitism.

At the EiGHT report documents, MSF's internal communications — including posts on its "Souk" portal — often feature anti-Israel and anti-Jewish invective.

After I called out antisemitism on the platform, one respondent warned me not to play the "Jewish card." Another described Israel as "a racist, Nazi and genocidal state." Others questioned my humanity and my legitimacy as a humanitarian. One declared that the world must be liberated "from the grip of Zionism."

Despite these violations of the Souk's terms of use, which prohibit bigotry, hate speech and personal attacks, Souk administrators let the remarks stand. Notably, I have not seen a single MSF leader condemn them.

Indeed, leadership has contributed to the vitriol, deepening a permissive environment for the open expression of anti-Jewish sentiment. The immediate past president of the MSF-USA board of directors wrote on the Souk that Israel is an imperialist state that follows "white supremacist logic," and that we must all "decolonize our minds."

Much of it is unabashedly public.

Social media posts by current and former MSF officials traffic in anti-Jewish hate, including age-old blood libel tropes. A former international president declared that "Zionists" share the blame for the Tree of Life Synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh in October 2018.

In May 2025, in a since-deleted X post, the general director of MSF-UK expressed gratitude for a donation from the Irish rap group Kneecap. Months earlier, the band waved Hezbollah's flag onstage and chanted, "Up Hamas, up Hezbollah" — two designated terrorist groups sworn to Israel's annihilation and soaked in both Jewish and Palestinian blood. The widely publicized stunts led to a (since dropped) terrorism charge. MSF-UK defends accepting the donation, saying that Kneecap claimed it "did not support Hamas or Hezbollah."

Still, quite the company for a humanitarian organization to keep.

Perhaps nothing better illustrates MSF's betrayal of Jewish colleagues than the typical double standard.

After a spate of brutal attacks on Asian-Americans in New York City during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, MSF-USA leadership appropriately circulated an internal message of solidarity, emphasizing emotional support services available to staff affected by the violence.

In its statement to the Post, MSF said it "understands how dangerous antisemitism is" and is "committed to taking it seriously." It added that antisemitism expressed by staff is "unacceptable and fundamentally incompatible with our humanitarian principles."

Please. That's just gaslighting.

While MSF commands enormous respect for its humanitarian work, moral authority is not self-sustaining. It's predicated on genuine introspection, with the honesty and rigour it demands of others. It also requires confronting, accepting and rectifying uncomfortable truths.

The Al-Ahli post was neither a mere communications failure, nor — as the EiGHT report shows — were my experiences isolated incidents.

Together, they force a fundamental question: is MSF willing, or even able, to confront its own blind spots? Or will they ultimately have to be held to account by others?

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