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**To: Heads of Governments of Commonwealth Countries**

June 19<sup>th</sup> 2025

**RE: Urgent appeal to end childhood malnutrition in Gaza**

Dear Head of Government,

We are writing to express our gravest concerns regarding the life-threatening health and nutrition crisis currently affecting children in Gaza.

Members of our Association from across the Commonwealth have worked together for more than 40 years to reduce the scourge of malnutrition and improve the health of children in poorer countries. Malnutrition has devastating consequences—not only contributing to short-term mortality but also impairing a child's long-term growth, development, and ability to contribute to their society.

Malnutrition in poorer nations is a complex issue, influenced by a combination of poor diets, infections, and broader socioeconomic factors. Despite these challenges, sustained efforts have led to a gradual decline in malnutrition rates. It is, therefore, with great dismay that we now witness the widespread emergence of malnutrition among the population of Gaza<sup>1,2</sup>—tragically exemplified by the story of five-month-old Sewar.<sup>3</sup> This crisis is intolerable, especially as it is man-made, driven by insufficient access to food and health care for children and their mothers. The population of Gaza faces a bleak future if the widespread malnutrition amongst its children, the most vulnerable members of every society, is not addressed urgently.

We applaud the efforts of UNICEF<sup>3</sup> and many other actors in their attempts to provide life-saving therapeutic food and other critical actions to address malnutrition. However, we are equally aware that decisive political solutions are needed for a sustainable solution.

Although Gaza is not a member of the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Charter<sup>4</sup> affirms our collective commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the rights and wellbeing of young people, and the principle that everyone should have access to safe, sufficient, and nutritious food. We therefore urge you as the Head of Government of a Commonwealth country, to do everything in your power to end this unfolding tragedy. Children need immediate access to nutritious food and appropriate medical care. Time is of the essence; a malnourished child cannot wait until tomorrow (Gabriela Mistral - poet, educator, diplomat and Nobel Laureate).<sup>5</sup>



# Commonwealth Association of Paediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition

Yours sincerely,

Robert Bandsma; President, on behalf of the CAPGAN Council and Advisory Group

cc. The Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, London

1. <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org.uk/press-releases/child-malnutrition-in-gaza-reaches-unprecedented-levels>
2. Bhutta Z A, Dominguez G B, Wise P H. When is enough, enough? Humanitarian rights and protection for children in conflict settings must be revisited BMJ 2024; 386 :e081515  
doi:10.1136/bmj-2024-081515
3. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/donate/children-in-gaza-crisis-appeal/>
4. <https://thecommonwealth.org/charter>
5. Mistral, G. (2005). "A child cannot wait." In the selected collection, 32.