**Dear Guests,** Precious medical students, physicians of the future from all around the World,

I greet you warmly on behalf of Turkish Medical Association (TMA). With your permission, I want to call you as “my young colleagues”. In our opinion, you are our colleagues and members of medical community starting from your first year in medical school.

First of all I congratulate my young colleagues who put their labour in organizing this significant gathering. Undertaking such responsibilities while studying medicine, which is a quite laborious process, bringing together young colleagues from different parts of the world for the betterment of medical education and health, organizing meetings in such perfection certainly deserve much appreciation.

I also congratulate my young colleagues who selected the theme “humanitarian actions” for the 64th General Assembly of the International Federation of Medical Students’ Associations (IFMSA). As physicians and health workers it is true that while we are striving to defend and promote our rights in the profession we also stand out for our professional values and the right of people to health. We know that our profession is about human beings and health is the right of all. It is our duty to deliver healthcare to all, without any discrimination on any ground. Under the main theme of this assembly, you are going to discuss healthcare particularly in extraordinary situations like armed conflict, earthquake, flood, famine, tsunami and so on. You are going to discuss these in a country like Turkey where extraordinary situations are unfortunately experienced rather frequently. So your theme is quite meaningful and also pertinent to this specific geography.

Within the last four years, about 2 million people have taken refuge in Turkey as a result of conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Some of these people, approximately 250,000 persons are now living in refugee camps organized by the State in regions close to the southern border of Turkey. Basic needs, including healthcare, are relatively better attended to in these camps. But there are many others dispersed to different parts of the country trying to make their living. These people face severe difficulties in subsistence, starting a new life and in accessing health services including protective health, housing and nutrition. Further, it is not certain when conflicts in their countries will come to an end and whether they will ever be able to return to their homeland. Besides those fleeing from the massacres of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, there are also many wounded people taking refuge in Turkey to whom both official and volunteer health teams, including those from the TMA, are trying to help.

Yes, the role and place of health workers in conflict environments is the main theme of your General Assembly meeting. Yet, physicians, health workers and students of medicine in Turkey face such situations that can be seen only rarely elsewhere. In fact, these situations are to the extent that they are addressed specifically by international medical and human rights organizations. Some of these are so striking to be included in the history of medicine and as such they deserve to be addressed by your gathering as well. I will try to describe what I mean.

During peaceful street demonstrations of June 2013, also known as “Gezi Park protests” the police resorted to extreme violence, turning cities into gas chambers with intensive use of tear gas; eight citizens lost their life, more than 8,000 persons were injured and there were some losing their eye, all caused by tear gas cartridges, water cannons, rubber or even real bullets. The Ministry of Health took no initiative to stop police violence in these events and made no arrangement to deliver urgent services despite obvious need. Leaving these aside, the Ministry instructed health facilities to record on separate forms the identity of persons applying for injuries and to report these back to the Ministry. Consequently thousands of citizens in need of urgent healthcare abstained from going to health facilities for the fear of being blacklisted. In such an environment of violence, physicians, health workers and students of medicine from all parts of Turkey rushed to the help of injured citizens and tried to deliver urgent care at some points. There were police attacks to these points and health workers and students of medicine were detained while trying to help injured citizens. Starting in those days and afterwards the Ministry of Health threatened the TMA and chambers of medicine that “it would take action against the delivery of unauthorized health services”, conducted investigations, and asked for the names of both injured persons and health workers who helped them. Then there were court cases for removal from duty of governing bodies of Ankara, İstanbul and Hatay Chambers of Medicine. And a recent good news, the judge rejected the application of the Ministry and dismissed the case against Ankara Chamber of Medicine last week. However, presently two young physicians who helped injured citizens in a mosque where they fled are being tried for “fouling the mosque and assisting offenders.” Moreover, a legislation was enacted in this period, defining a new offense “delivering unauthorized health services, which makes the delivery of voluntary health and first aid services subject to the permission of the Ministry. According to the legislation, those who breach this provision are punishable by imprisonment up to 3 years and monetary fine of about 800 000 USD. The TMA stood firmly against these court trials and the legislation together and in solidarity with international medical and human rights organizations including the World Medical Association, Standing Committee of European Doctors and Physicians for Human Rights.

So what do you say my young colleagues? Isn’t it worth discussing in this General Assembly? I hope you’ll do and incorporate it into your final resolution statement. Our struggle is for the universal values of the profession of medicine and the right of all to enjoy healthcare without any discrimination.

Long live the right to health! Long live the international solidarity of students of medicine!

I warmly greet you all again and wish you a successful General Assembly.

Bayazıt İlhan

President

Turkish Medical Association