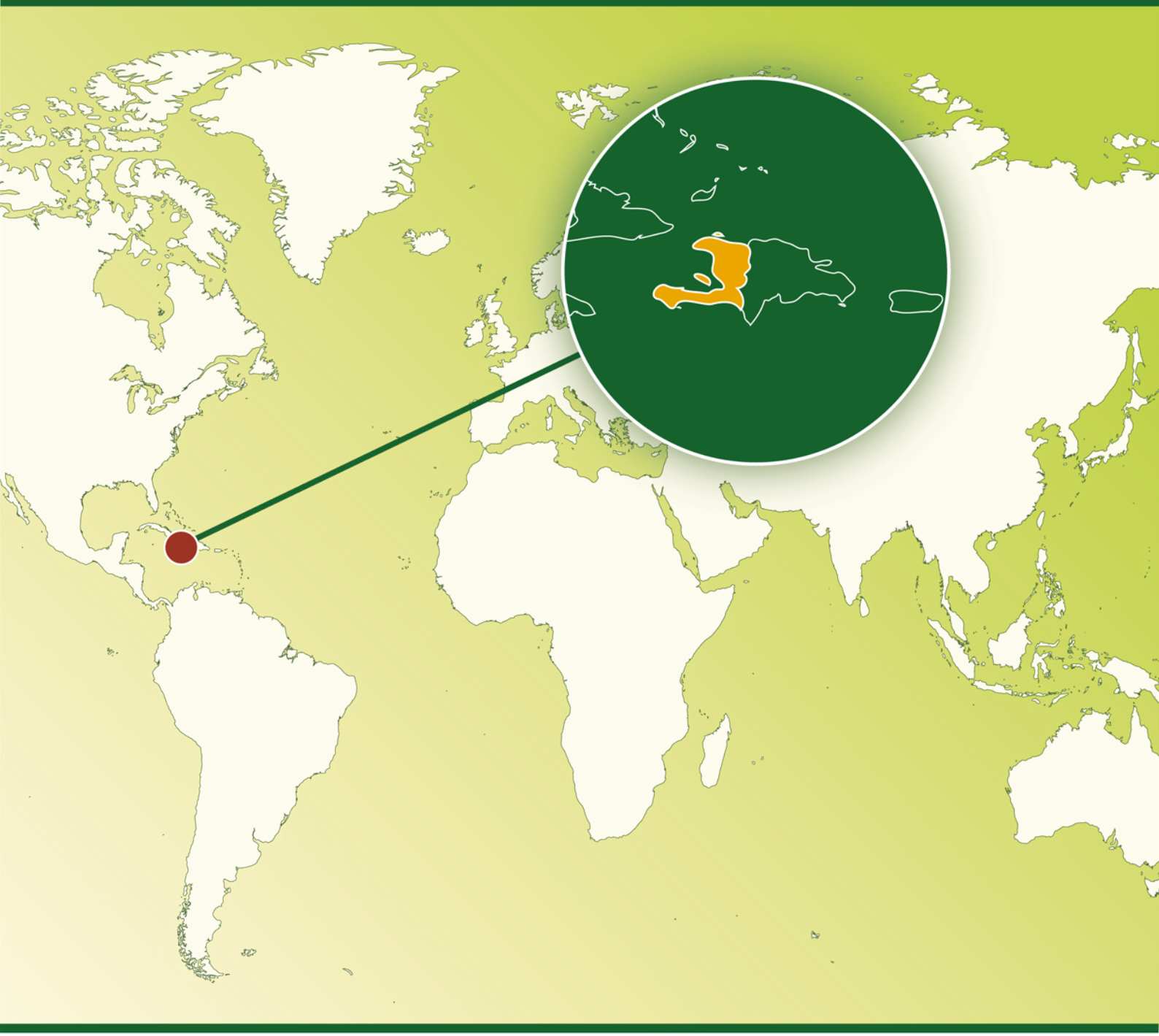
HAITI

Violence Against Health Care in Conflict

2023



SAFEGUARDING HEALTH IN CONFLICT

Insecurity Insight

Data on People in Danger

Letter from the Chair

The year 2023 was a grim one for violence inflicted on health care. In 2022, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition identified the highest number of incidents since we began reporting. Yet in 2023 the number was 25% greater, exceeding 2,500.

The intensity of conflicts characterized by pervasive attacks on health care in recent years declined somewhat in 2023, including in Syria, Yemen, and the Tigray region of Ethiopia. As a result, it might also have been expected that the global trend of violence against health care would turn downward. Instead, from the first days of two new and catastrophic wars, one in Sudan and the other between Israel and Hamas, health care came under ferocious assault. In both conflicts warring parties killed health workers, attacked facilities, and destroyed health care systems. Meanwhile, attacks on health care in Myanmar and Ukraine continued at a relentless pace, in each case exceeding 1,000 since the start of the conflicts in 2021 and 2022, respectively. In many chronic conflicts, fighting forces continued to kidnap and kill health workers and loot health facilities.

At the same time, new and disturbing trends emerged. In Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Gaza, Lebanon, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen combatants employed drones to attack health clinics, hospitals, and ambulances. In many conflicts, combatants violently entered hospitals or occupied them as sites from which to conduct military operations, leading to injuries to and the deaths of patients and staff. In many conflicts, the conduct of combatants revealed open contempt for their duty to protect civilians and health care under international humanitarian law (IHL). Israel, while purporting to abide by IHL, promoted a view of its obligations that, if accepted, would undermine the fundamental protections that IHL puts in place for civilians and health care in war.

The one consistent feature of the attacks was continued impunity for these crimes. For more than a decade, despite their repeated commitments, governments have failed to follow through on these commitments and reform their military practices, cease arms transfers to perpetrators, and bring those responsible for crimes to justice.

We need a new approach, starting with stronger leadership from UN agencies and governments willing to join with civil society and the health care community to take far more assertive action to end the scourge of violence against health care. Among other steps, they can press prosecutors domestically and internationally to bring cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against health care, to develop political support for special tribunals to circumvent UN Security Council members' vetoes of referrals to the International Criminal Court, and restrict the sale of arms to forces that commit crimes.

There are some sources of hope. After years of lassitude, the World Health Organization has spoken forcefully against vicious assaults on health facilities and health workers. Civil society groups are exerting pressure to stop arms transfers to perpetrators of violence, while some militaries have launched initiatives to reduce civilian casualties in war. Leaders must build on these initiatives. Ending the suffering of millions of people depends on their doing so.

Len Rubenstein
Chair, Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition

Executive Summary | *Full Report* | *Recommendations* | *Methodology* | *Data*

Haiti 2022-2023

REPORTED INCIDENTS AND MOST COMMONLY REPORTED CONCERNS

REPORTED INCIDENTS	HEALTH WORKERS KIDNAPPED	INCIDENTS WHERE HEALTH FACILITIES WERE RAIDED
2023		
40	33	8
2022		
9	10	9

Source: 2022-2023 HTI SHCC Health Care Data

OVERVIEW

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 40 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Haiti in 2023 and nine in 2022, compared to 15 in 2021, when the last SHCC report chapter on Haiti was published.[1] In these 40 incidents, at least 33 health workers were kidnapped and health facilities were forcibly entered on eight separate occasions. This factsheet is based on the dataset 2022-2023 HTI SHCC Health Care Data, which is available for download on the Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX).

THE CONTEXT

Following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021, violence rapidly increased in Haiti, primarily in and around Port-au-Prince, as criminal gangs and vigilante groups vied for control over certain areas, with direct impacts on health care. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, in 2023 the number of gangs actively contributing to violence doubled and there was a 60% increase in violence perpetrated by gangs compared to 2021. By the end of 2023, around 80% of Port-au-Prince was controlled by gangs, while violence began to spread to other departments, such as Artibonite.

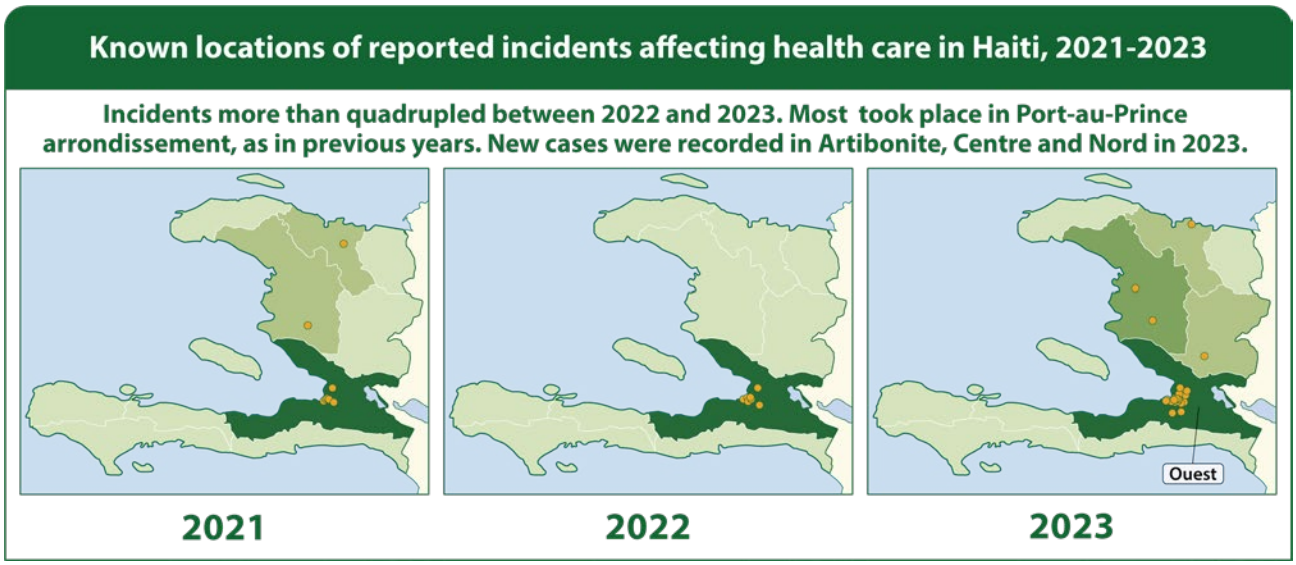
Kidnappings increased in Port-au-Prince at the start of 2023 after police forces suspended services in certain parts of the city in protest over their limited resources for tackling violence, forcing some hospitals to suspend their operations due to a risk of further insecurity in the area. Fighting between gangs affiliated with G9 and G-Pèp coalitions increased and spread to new areas, which forced civilians to form self-defense groups in an attempt to tackle the gang violence, further contributing to increasing insecurity.

Haiti 2022-2023

According to UNICEF, by the end of 2023 around 5.5 million people were estimated to need humanitarian assistance and faced difficulties accessing basic necessities, including health care.

VIOLENCE AGAINST OR OBSTRUCTION OF HEALTH CARE IN 2023

Incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care more than quadrupled in Haiti from 2022 to 2023, reflecting the wider deterioration in security in the country over this period. More than three-quarters of incidents took place in Ouest department, particularly Port-au-Prince arrondissement, following a pattern that reflects the geographic concentration of incidents in previous years. New cases were recorded in Artibonite, Centre, and Nord departments in 2023.

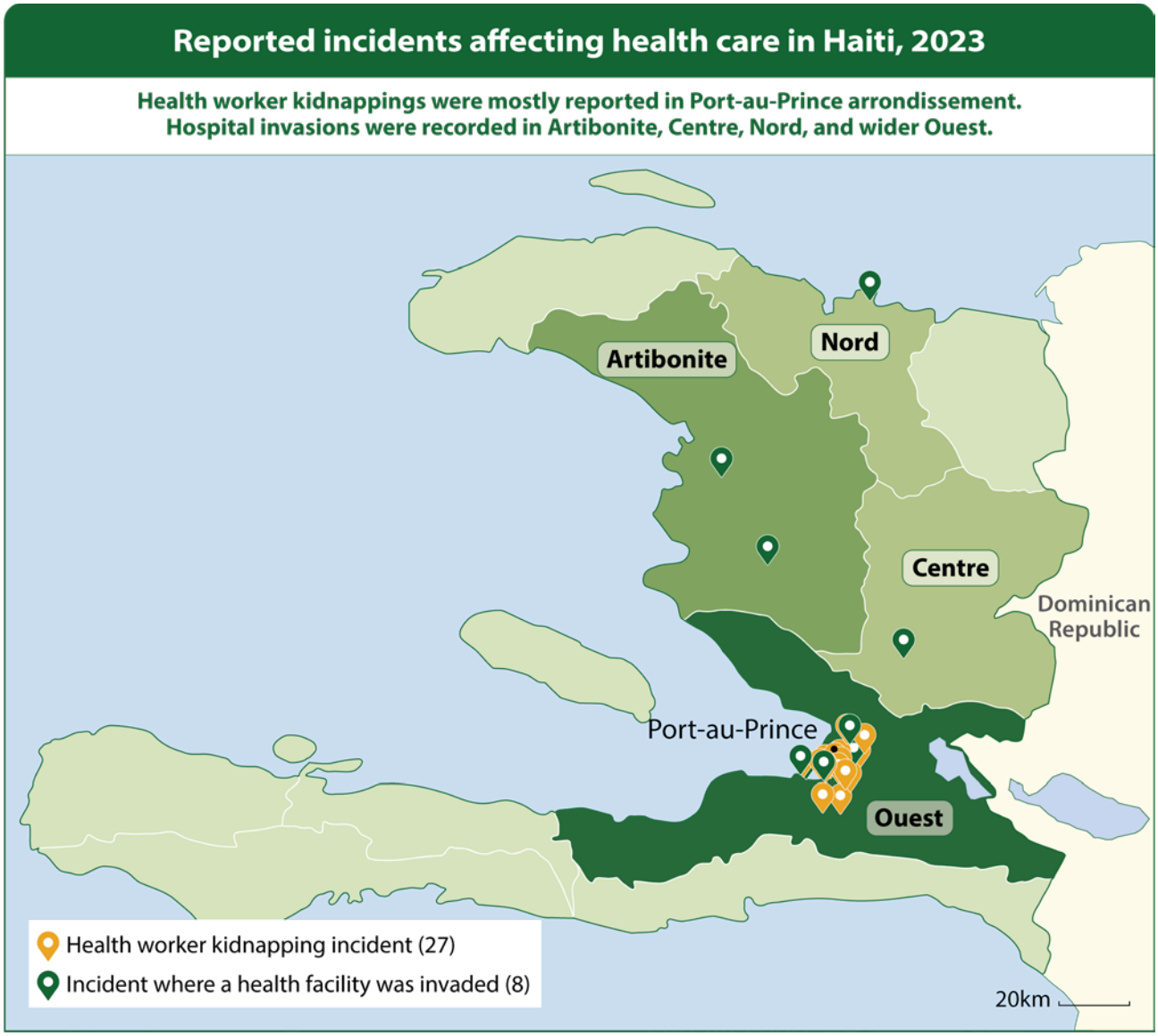


Health worker kidnappings increased in 2023, with most affecting staff working for the national health structure in Port-au-Prince arrondissement, Ouest. Hospital raids and invasions directly affected NGOs and were more widely dispersed in Artibonite, Centre, Nord, and wider Ouest.

Most incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care were attributed to gang members or unidentified men with guns. In March 2023, 400 Mawozo gang members kidnapped a doctor from his private clinic in Port-au-Prince and invaded Justinien Hospital in Cap-Haitien, Nord department.[2] For the first time since the SHCC began monitoring the situation in Haiti, Kokorat San Ras gang members were named as perpetrators of violence against health care in the country in 2023. During the incident, Kokorat San Ras gang members kidnapped a nurse for ransom in Artibonite in December.[3] In February, four incidents involved Haitian police officers in Port-au-Prince arrondissement searching NGO-supported hospitals in Tabarre and Turgeau, and NGO ambulances in Delmas and Tabarre.[4]

> *As a result of the insecurity, only 4% of the population in Cité Soleil neighborhood made use of public health infrastructure.*

Haiti 2022-2023



Health workers kidnapped

In total, 33 health workers were kidnapped in 27 incidents in 2023, compared to ten in five incidents in 2022. Most kidnappings took place in Port-au-Prince arrondissement, with one in Artibonite involving the previously mentioned nurse and another in Croix des Bouquet, Ouest department.[5] Staff were kidnapped outside a hospital, at home, or as they traveled to or from work, a pattern that reflected previous years. Most kidnapped staff worked for the national health structure and four were employed by an NGO. Twenty-one of the 33 kidnapped heath workers were doctors, including an epidemiologist, a gynecologist, and a urologist. Twenty-two were male and six female.[6] Most kidnapped staff were released unharmed after one to 13 days, and often ransoms were demanded as a condition for their release, suggesting that health workers were targeted for their perceived wealth. The exceptions were two incidents in Petionville, where a kidnapped doctor was killed by gang members in February and a doctor was shot resisting abduction by gang members in April.[7] The fates of the remaining staff were not recorded.

Haiti 2022-2023

Health facilities attacked

NGO-supported health facilities were attacked by gang members or unidentified men armed with guns at least eight times in 2023, compared to one in 2022. Among the hospitals forcefully entered in 2023 were Justinien Hospital (Nord), Mirebalais Hospital (Centre), Raoul Pierre Louis Hospital (Ouest), and Tabarre Hospital (Ouest).[8] Often medical services were temporarily suspended in response to these attacks. Two patients were kidnapped by gang members who attacked hospitals in Port-au-Prince's Carrefour and Tabarre neighborhoods.[9] In Carrefour, the patient was dragged from Raoul Pierre Louis Hospital's emergency department, taken outside, and shot dead.[10] In other incidents, a hospital was hit by gunfire during fighting between rival gangs in March in Cité Soleil, Port-au-Prince. A 70-year-old man was shot as he crossed the street to access the hospital. In response, the facility was temporarily closed.[11]

THE IMPACT OF ATTACKS ON HEALTH CARE

With about 300 gangs active across Haiti and most of the capital under gang control, health facilities and health workers increasingly found themselves on the front lines of the conflict, operating in a very complex and insecure environment. Humanitarian organizations and health workers were often required to coordinate with multiple gangs to be able to deliver aid and access communities. Often health workers were unable to reach certain areas or had to stop operating in specific areas due to heightening insecurity. In October 2023, the Haitian Red Cross reported that it had been forced to limit its ambulance services to certain localities in the capital as a result of increasing insecurity and limited financial, material, and human resources to maintain its activities. Additionally, communities were also restricted to their neighborhood and were unable to cross into territories controlled by other gangs, making access to health care increasingly difficult.

Many health facilities were forced to suspend operations due to high levels of insecurity in the area, placing both health workers and patients at risk. In Cité Soleil neighborhood, an area heavily affected by violence in the past years, by March 2023 only one private hospital and one Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) clinic were still open after MSF was forced to temporarily close its clinic in the area on March 8 due to the "intolerable risks" of increasing gang violence. As a result of the insecurity, only 4% of the population in this neighborhood made use of public health infrastructure.

Communities in Haiti, including communities of health workers, were very exposed to violence. According to a survey carried out by MSF, 14.5% of correspondents living in Cité Solei had witnessed extreme violence, including murders or lynchings in the streets. Health workers were forced to witness violence in their day-to-day lives and faced almost daily threats of kidnappings, roadblocks, and verbal and armed attacks, placing a huge strain on their mental health that is likely to have long-lasting effects. Mental health services for the community, including health care workers, are inadequate to handle the increasing mental health needs of the population.

Haiti 2022-2023

1 The SHCC report contains a country chapter when at least 15 incidents of violence against health care were reported in one calendar year or at least 30 incidents were reported over multiple years. The reported incidents from Haiti were included in the total figures for the past years, but because the SHCC report did not list these incidents individually in 2022, the recorded incidents are listed here.
2 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 HTI SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 38343; 38342.
3 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 HTI SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 42853.
4 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 HTI SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 41503; 41502; 41500, 44970.
5 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 HTI SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 44981.
6 The profession and gender of the remaining staff were not recorded.
7 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 HTI SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 38017; 38499.
8 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 HTI SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 38342; 42161; 42161; 37174; 38289.
9 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 HTI SHCC Health Care Data. Incident numbers 37174.39852.
10 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 HTI SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 37174.
11 Insecurity Insight. Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition 2023 Report Dataset: 2023 HTI SHCC Health Care Data. Incident number 38289.

SAFEGUARDING
HEALTH
IN CONFLICT

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition is a group of more than 40 organizations working to protect health workers and services threatened by war or civil unrest. We have raised awareness of global attacks on health and pressed United Nations agencies for greater global action to protect the security of health care. We monitor attacks, strengthen universal norms of respect for the right to health, and demand accountability for perpetrators.
www.safeguardinghealth.org

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