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Situation of Palestinian Children Continues in Downward Spiral

Israeli forces shot dead four Palestinian children in separate incidents across the occupied West Bank city of Hebron in the first two weeks of the year.

On Saturday, an Israeli security guard killed a Palestinian girl at the entrance to the West Bank settlement of Anatot, near Jerusalem, Defence for Children International - Palestine is still verifying the details.

The number of child fatalities has drastically increased since October 2015, after tensions across East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories escalated into lethal attacks. DCIP has confirmed that over the past 16 weeks, Israeli forces fatally shot at least 30 Palestinian children, all except seven while carrying out alleged knife attacks.

Israeli authorities have not opened investigations into any of these shootings and have refused family requests for autopsies that could verify the circumstances of their deaths.

Israeli forces and security personnel now appear to be implementing a 'shoot-to-kill' policy, which in most incidents may amount to extrajudicial killings. International law requires that intentional lethal force be used only when absolutely unavoidable.

Israeli authorities also relaxed open-fire rules, allowing Israeli forces to use live ammunition during protests in Jerusalem — as in the rest of the occupied territories — when there is a "threat to life." Previously, live ammunition was permitted in Jerusalem only when there is a direct, mortal threat to the life of a police officer or soldier.

Amid heightened violence in the fall of 2015, the number of Palestinian children in Israeli prisons skyrocketed to the highest it has been since March 2009. At the end of November, 412 Palestinian children were in the Israeli prison system.

DCIP is particularly disturbed that Israeli authorities have issued administrative detention orders against seven Palestinian teenagers. Administrative detention is the imprisonment of individuals by the state for prolonged periods without charge or trial. It is the first time the measure has been used against Palestinian minors in nearly four years.

Three of the teenagers were released after spending three months in detention. International law demands that no child should be deprived of his or her liberty arbitrarily,



and administrative detention should never be used as a substitute for criminal prosecution where there is insufficient evidence to obtain a conviction.

Over the past few months, Israeli authorities pushed through a series of policies imposing harsher sentencing guidelines and fines for children in Jerusalem.

The amendments include a 10-year prison sentence for throwing stones or other objects at moving vehicles with the possibility of endangering passengers or causing damage, and 20 years for throwing stones with the purpose of harming others. They also reduced judicial discretion, instituting mandatory minimum sentence of no less than one-fifth of the potential maximum sentence and restricting suspended sentences to special circumstances only.

One of the latest bills proposes custodial sentences for Jerusalem children, as young as 12, convicted of “nationalistic-motivated” violent offences.

Systemic impunity and the persistent grave human rights violations inherent in Israel's prolonged military occupation of Palestinians have, in part, triggered the recent wave of lethal attacks.

The consistent failure of the international community to take concrete action that would challenge the impunity enjoyed by the Israeli military and police provides tacit approval for them to continue carrying out grave violations against Palestinian children.

Lack of justice and accountability all but ensures the situation for Palestinian children continues in a downward spiral.

More information

Defence for Children International, DCI, is an independent grassroots and right based international non-governmental organization that promotes and protects children's rights on a global, regional, national and local level. DCI is one of the leading NGOs with regards to issues of juvenile justice with the ground presence in five continents: 46 national sections and an International Secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland. For more information, visit our website www.defenceforchildren.org or contact: info@defenceforchildren.org