Statement on behalf of Defence for Children International (DCI)

ISRAEL’S ARMED FORCES AND GRAVE VIOLATIONS OF CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

Amid escalating violence since October 2015, the situation for Palestinian children living under prolonged Israeli military occupation has significantly deteriorated. In early October, the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, promised a “harsh offensive” in response to violent criminal attacks and protests against Israel’s occupation and military violence. Ten months later, 52 Palestinian children from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have been killed since October 1, 2015, all except one at the hands of Israeli forces. Of this number, 42 allegedly carried out stabbing, shooting, or car ramming attacks, according Defense for Children International – Palestine (DCIP) data.

In several cases, DCIP found that children did not pose a direct, mortal threat at the time they were killed, suggesting that Israeli forces are implementing a ‘shoot-to-kill’ policy, which in some incidents may amount to willful killings. Accountability for shootings by Israeli forces is extremely rare, and Israeli authorities have rejected opening full and transparent investigations into recent incidents.

Attacks against civilians are prohibited by international law and states have the right to protect their citizens from violence. However, international law also requires that intentional lethal force only be used when absolutely unavoidable to protect life, and only when lesser means would be insufficient to apprehend a suspect.

The number of Palestinian children in Israeli prisons, where according to UNICEF ill-treatment of children is widespread, systematic, and institutionalized from the moment of arrest, has spiked dramatically. While Israeli forces have held an average of 201 Palestinian children in custody each month since 2011, by the end of February the total had increased to 440, the highest number at any given point since the Israel Prison Service began releasing data in 2008. The Israel Prison Service has further complicated efforts to monitor the child rights situation in the occupied West Bank by withholding detention data since April.

In another troubling development, Israeli authorities renewed the use of administrative detention against Palestinian children in October 2015. Administrative detention is a process whereby a child is detained without charge or trial, often renewable indefinitely.

Children under 18 years old now represent 46 percent of the 4.68 million Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. This generation is growing up with a future stifled by systemic discrimination, settlement expansion, and a prolonged military occupation with no end in sight.

Defence for Children International urges all members of the Human Rights Council to:

- Demand that Israeli authorities immediately stop the use of administrative detention orders against Palestinian children and enshrine this prohibition in law;
- Condemn Israeli forces’ use of excessive force in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, against Palestinians; and
- Demand that Israeli forces at all times act in accordance with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.