

Thirtieth special session of the Human Rights Council

Geneva, 27 May 2021

Special session to address the grave human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories including East Jerusalem

Statement by Defence for Children International

Supported by [Humanium](#), [Child Rights International Network](#)

Madam President/Mr. Vice-President,

Since 10th May 2021, at least 270 Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have been killed, including at least 67 children in Gaza and 5 children in the West Bank, while more than 8,742 Palestinians were injured, including 610 children in Gaza and 88 children in the West Bank.

DCI-Palestine documented at least two Israeli attacks in which there were mass child casualties. Eight children and two mothers were killed in Al-Shati refugee camp west of Gaza City early on May 15 when an Israeli warplane targeted the house, they had gathered in to celebrate Eid al-Fitr. The only survivor of the attack was a five-month-old baby apparently shielded by his mother's body. At least 18 children and 25 adults were killed in Israeli airstrikes on Al-Wedha Street in Gaza City at 1 a.m. on May 16.

The Gaza Strip's essential civilian infrastructure, already weakened by a 14-year closure, has rapidly deteriorated, including more than fifty schools that were damaged by Israeli bombs. The shelling and bombing leave children with mental and physical scars that will remain with them for the rest of their lives. After living through successive military offensives and the ongoing military-imposed closure children in Gaza feel a deep sense of insecurity, fear, and hopelessness.

Children have the right to live free from violence and the threat of bombs. To ensure that children can look forward to a future without fear, there must be an unconditional lifting of the closure and an end to the occupation.

Our documentation indicates that Israeli forces targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure, and failed to abide by international humanitarian law, which prohibits indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks and requires all parties to an armed conflict to distinguish between military targets, civilians, and civilian objects. Israeli forces are bound to customary international law rules of proportionality and necessity. As the occupying power in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), including the Gaza Strip, Israel is required to protect the Palestinian civilian population from violence.

Israeli forces have killed 1,172 Palestinian children in the OPT since the 2008-2009 Israeli military offensive, Operation Cast Lead. 1048 of these children were killed in the Gaza Strip.

Ceasefire does not mean an end to Israeli injustice and aggression against Palestinian children in the OPT. Children will continue to be denied the enjoyment of their rights and will continue to bear the brunt

of these military offensives and the cruelty of Israel's closure policies if the underlying causes are not addressed.

Since Operation Cast Lead, the Human Rights Council has established three United Nations independent commissions of inquiry to respond to situations of serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in the OPT. Despite these investigations, there has been little to no accountability for the perpetrators. All children living under Israeli control must have their rights realized as required under international law, specifically the Convention on the Rights of the child, and impunity for human rights violations must end. These are essential pre-requisites to reestablish the rule of law.

We strongly urge all member states:

- To take urgent action to ensure accountability for violations by supporting efforts by the International Criminal Court to hold perpetrators accountable and by carrying out obligations under the Geneva Conventions or Rome Statute to exercise criminal jurisdiction and arrest persons alleged to have committed, or who ordered to have committed, international crimes;
- To demand that Israel stops its apartheid system and its military attacks against Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the West Bank;
- To demand that Israel ends its prolonged military occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and its 14-year closure of the Gaza Strip, a form of collective punishment prohibited under international law;
- To demand that the United Nations and International Civil Society Organisations take immediate actions to provide shelter, assistance and trauma care including intensified psychosocial support for children and their families affected by the Israeli assaults on Gaza.