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Depriving children of their liberty is depriving them of their childhood...One of the important messages that came out of the 2019 publication of the Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty (GSCDL).

Children deprived of liberty are largely an invisible group of children, and the Study faced significant challenges since the launch of the campaign for a Global Study in 2014, from the collection of data by member states, up to its publication in 2019. This is the 3rd global study of this kind, following the 1996 report of Graça Machel on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, and the 2006 United Nations Study on Violence against Children, led by Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro. Many experts and NGOs have identified this gap in child detention and deprivation of liberty more general. In 1986, DCI published “Children in Adult Prisons.” This publication included information from 28 countries that were collected through questionnaires that DCI had conceived and circulated.

The main focus was on children detained together with adults, however, 3 years before the adoption of the Convention, this study puts on the international agenda already some key-questions, such as the minimum age of criminal responsibility, and the incoherence of the national legislations; it also points out the fact that in all cases examined we can never be satisfied when a child is in prison while other non-custodial measures could be found in the ‘child's best interests’.

The adoption of the Convention in 1989 was a big step forward that was not only linked to the specific Article 37 providing for the deprivation of liberty “shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time,” but also linked to the other general principles that introduce the holistic rights-based approach. In 2006, Sergio Pinheiro in his World Report on Violence against children touches upon the subject within the chapter “Children in custody and detention” and starts framing the dimensions of the problem worldwide with concrete examples from all continents.

However, concrete data was still missing in order to prove to member states that this is a priority both in terms of gravity as well as of number of children concerned. In 2007, UNICEF estimated that more than 1 million children were detained through justice systems worldwide at any one time, although they added that this is likely to be a significant underestimate given the difficulties in obtaining data about the many unreported children in custody. In 2014, when Defence for Children International (DCI), together with Human Rights Watch and some 40 other NGOs launched a campaign for a Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty, very few organisations and experts believed that the this was something feasible. Despite the difficulties, forty-five (45) major NGOs joined together with DCI to send a letter to the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, asking for the Global Study.
The Special Rapporteur on torture, Juan E. Méndez, the UNCRC, and other individual personalities and experts joined their voices to support the idea of a Global Study. Finally, in December 2014 the General Assembly adopted resolution 69/157 asking the Secretary-General to "commission a Global Study." In October 2019, the report of the Global Study was presented to the UN General Assembly in New York, and in November of the same year the full Global Study, with more than 750 pages, was presented in Geneva during the celebrations for the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 40th of DCI.

Summarised in a few lines, all this seems natural and easy, for all those who have accompanied the lead author and independent expert, Prof. Manfred Nowak, in this complex exercise, we know that this has not been a "quiet river," but rather a steep and twisting road full of obstacles. What was important then was to finalise the Study to give all the data, both quantitative and qualitative, to explain why priority needs to be given to this invisible group: Over 7 million children de facto or de jure deprived of liberty every year, also acknowledging the dimension and range of every type of deprivation of liberty of children from the administration of justice, children living in prison with their caregivers, children in institutions but also in the context of migration, armed conflicts, or detainment on the grounds of national security.

Two years after the finalisation of the Study, the Covid-19 pandemic has given some additional elements, exacerbating violations of human rights of children including those deprived of liberty. This has also offered concrete examples proving that the roadmap to finish with deprivation of liberty exists, and related State policies are a win-win process and a virtual circle for everybody, firstly the best interests of the child, societies and member states themselves. We therefore come back this autumn of 2021 and ask that the UN General Assembly confirms in its bi-annual resolution on child rights a clear mandate to the SRSG on violence against children, Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid to coordinate joint efforts of UN agencies and civil society, joining hands for the implementation of the recommendations of the Global Study. We also support the presentation of a report at the UN General Assembly 2022, three years after the publication of the Study, to evaluate where we are and how to speed up the process of implementation, so that every child has the right to a childhood and no child is left behind bars.

Alex Kamarotos
Executive Director
Defence for Children International
International Secretariat
CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY: BETTING ON EDUCATION

By Benoit Van Keirsbilck, Director of DCI-Belgium and member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty was presented to the United Nations two years ago already and it is clear that so far there has not been a real enthusiasm on the part of States to ensure the follow-up while the pandemic period has exacerbated the problems and violations of the fundamental rights of detained children in general and in particular of those who are deprived of their liberty in the context of the administration of justice.

The Global Study painted a dramatic picture, but one that obviously did not surprise the majority of informed observers. Deprivation of liberty being most often a measure of first resort, decided almost automatically, for an inordinately long period, often for minor offenses or facts which should never lead to a public intervention of a criminal nature, but rather to the increased involvement of child protection services.

The children concerned mainly belong to ethnic minorities or to the most disadvantaged groups in society. They are affected far more than average by mental, physical or psychological health problems and have not benefited from an environment conducive to their development and the exercise of their fundamental rights.

"Most young people leave more damaged than when they entered"

The conditions of detention are generally extremely negative (overcrowding, violence including sexual violence, ill-treatment or even torture, isolation, deprivation, mixing with adults, mixing of girls and boys, lack of contact with the family, lack of education, access to health, basic needs, etc.) to the point that most young people leave more damaged than when they entered.
In short, the vast majority should not be behind bars and States should realise that it is in everyone’s best interests to change the paradigm completely.

The fact is that those who are trying to give impetus for change face a pharaonic task that may discourage even the bravest. The question remains; where to start when everything is a priority: improving protection systems, strengthening living standards, guaranteeing better access to quality education, supporting parents in their education task, promoting a less unequal society, fighting corruption. And if we look more specifically at the justice system, it is necessary that priority be given to diversion, and non-custodial educational measures. This must be accompanied by training of professionals at all levels, starting with the police, prosecutors, judges and social and educational workers.

"Ensure an individual assessment and a programme adapted to the situation and needs of each child"

The system must also guarantee the effective enjoyment of rights at all stages, during the procedure and in the framework of the implementation of measures. Undoubtedly, quality legal and social support must be provided by lawyers and social actors who are also specialised. The system must ensure an individual assessment and a programme adapted to the situation and needs of each child. Finally, specialised and independent remedies, complaint mechanisms and monitoring systems must be in place.

These changes will not take place without political will, without the determination of all the actors concerned and without a fundamental change in mentalities. As long as the child who broke the law is considered an outcast who deserves the worst of treatment, little will change as the practices described above continue to be justified. Rest assured, however difficult the task may seem, it is not impossible.

Many States have effectively engaged in a process of change, based on a well-thought-out action plan including objectives and indicators, with the technical support of United Nations agencies, the involvement of the academic world for monitoring and evaluation, and with the support of civil society. These examples exist, have been documented and can be used as examples to develop a roadmap. Many experts and practical guides can also be mobilised.

Without forgetting an actor who should play a major role in initiating and guiding changes: the children and in particular the children who have had experience of child justice and detention. They are in the best position, provided the conditions of their participation are respectful, to speak about their experience. If we take the time to listen to them, they will probably start by telling us about the grievances they experienced, the times when they were humiliated, discredited; they will tell us about their experiences of injustice, of the anguish of being in a jail or in an overcrowded and unsanitary cell.

They will explain to us to what extent they have been crushed by the police, judicial and prison machinery. Some will admit that they mourned the separation from their family and those around them. Many will point out the incomprehension of the vocabulary, the procedures and the role of the actors.

But they will also tell us about the people who listened to them, who took them seriously and gave them a chance; of those who have been able to give them perspectives and consider them as a unique human being who can bring something to society. They will remember the times when they felt grown up, respected, wanted to progress and felt it was possible.

We must be able to mobilise these words for the benefit of future generations, so that they do not endure what those before them have suffered. Ultimately, what the Global Study calls for is to bet on education rather than repression. You don’t educate a child behind bars. Let everyone fully be convinced of this.
By Laurel Townhead, Representative (Human Rights and Refugees) at Quaker United Nations Office

In almost all countries there are children living in prison with a parent, but the rules about when this happens (for example limiting this to only those children born in prison), what ages these children can stay with their parent until, and the conditions in which they live, vary greatly.

All children are rights holders, but not all children are automatically seen as such in the decisions that impact upon them.

Children who live in prison with a parent, and children separated from a parent by incarceration, need to be seen and specific actions need to be taken to uphold their rights.

The inclusion in the Global Study on Children Deprived of their Liberty of a specific chapter on children living in prison with a parent is important for the visibility it provides and the recommendations it makes. There has been increased attention to how existing international standards should be applied to uphold the rights of these children since the 2011 Committee on the Rights of the Child Day of General Discussion¹.

Though this the Committee sought to learn more about the impacts on children of parental imprisonment and strategies for upholding their rights. More recent developments, notably the Global Study, draw from this Day of General Discussion and provided new momentum for change to limit and mitigate rights violations faced by these children.
Discussions and developments have covered both the treatment of children whilst deprived of liberty with their parent and steps that should be taken to prevent children being put in this situation. An apparently straightforward solution would be to prohibit children from residing with a parent in prison.

However, there are significant short- and long-term impacts for children resulting from separation from a parent due to parental incarceration, and these impacts are not limited to those separated as babies or in their earliest years².

A clear recommendation from the Committee was:

*In sentencing parent(s) and primary caregivers, noncustodial sentences should, wherever possible, be issued in lieu of custodial sentences, including in the pre-trial and trial phase. Alternatives to detention should be made available and applied on a case-by-case basis, with full consideration of the likely impacts of different sentences on the best interests of the affected child(ren)*³.

The Global Study builds on this:

*Governments are encouraged to recognise both the detrimental impact of family separation due to parental incarceration and the detrimental impact of deprivation of liberty with a parent. All possible measures should be taken to reduce the number of children deprived of liberty with a parent in the criminal justice system without increasing the separation of children from a parent due to the parent’s incarceration. A presumption against a custodial measure or sentence for primary caregivers should apply*⁴.

Both recommendations contain within them the need for a State, through its sentencing authorities, to take into account the impacts on children of sentencing their parents. Core to this is the primacy of upholding the inherent dignity and best interests of the child in their specific circumstances.

The Day of General Discussion contemplated a recommendation for a maximum age for children residing in prison with a parent. This was considered given the range of ages (from around 6 months to around 6 years or older) and a recognition of the potential risks and impacts on wellbeing and development for children living in prison.

"The Committee decided against a uniform recommendation on age"

However, on reflection, and having heard from participants including children with a parent in prison, the Committee decided against a uniform recommendation on age. Instead, they emphasised the need for individualised assessments.

This emphasis on including individualised assessments of the best interests of the child in the sentencing decision is also contained in the first General Comment from the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child⁵. Which sets out a five-point checklist for sentencing authorities to consider.

Author: Sara (Mauritania)
Despite these recommendations, we are a long way from the use of best interests determinations whenever a parent is sentenced and children continue to be deprived of liberty with their parents in prison. Key concerns for upholding the rights of these children include:

- Safety
- Health
- Education and development
- Contact with family members outside the prison
- Preparation for release

Recommendations from the Global Study and from the Committee have sought to address these issues too⁶.

It is 10 years this September since the Day of General Discussion. In this decade, progress has been made in increasing knowledge, growing and establishing networks, and developing standards. The Global Study has contributed to each of these aspects.

However, there remains a need for further guidance to mitigate impacts of deprivation of liberty with a parent but also to prevent it whilst maintaining the best interests of the child. The inclusion of best interests of the child assessments in sentencing decisions is not a small ask, it requires knowledge and skills that sentencers may not yet have. Ensuring adequate nutrition, developmental support and paediatric health care in adult prisons is not a small ask either, it requires the input of relevant specialists.

Preparing children for release, especially if their parent is not released at the same time, is not a small ask, it requires coordination between different authorities including child welfare authorities as well as those responsible for prison management and release planning.

The Global Study has been important in providing further profile information and recommendations on the situation of children deprived of their liberty with a parent in prison and we expect mechanisms for follow-up to continue to include this particular group of children.

We also believe there is a need for detailed guidance and technical assistance for governments to support them in upholding the rights of these children. We are pleased to see interest in this from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and encourage States to support their project to develop a Global Toolkit on children with parents in prison.

Throughout our work on this topic, the role of partnership and participation have been clear and we trust that next steps with the Global Study will provide a stepping stone for States, the UN, NGOs, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children to come together with children with a parent in prison to ensure their rights are upheld.

¹ [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/Discussion2011.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/Discussion2011.aspx)


³ [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/Discussion2011.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/Discussion2011.aspx)

⁴ Manfred Nowak, The United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of their Liberty, Chapter 10, Section 5, para. 6.


This expectation finds valid ground. Amongst other international legal texts, Article 22 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, stipulates that states must ensure that children seeking international protection shall receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance, in equal terms to the rest of the child population within their territory.

However, in the recent years, transit or host countries to the refugee population have become creative in depriving children on the move of their liberty and present it as a matter of urgency or a measure taken for their protection. Sometimes, detention is presented as protection or other times as a last resort unavoidable measure. This trend has found thousands of children on the move detained and left without a childhood to claim.
Gradually, in the light of a massive increase in arrivals in Greece after 2016, the hotspots on the Greek islands acquired more characteristics of detention and areas where human rights have been systematically infringed. It has been used as a model of deterrence which is based on the practice of geographical limitation on people’s free movement.

This geographical restriction, which in reality, has effectively transformed hotspots into massive open-air prisons has kept thousands of refugee children away from that place of safety in search of which they initially embarked on and which are entitled to under International Human Rights Law.

In the outbreak of Covid-19, the children residing in the hotspots were forced into further restrictions of their liberty and discriminatory practices. As a response to the pandemic the Greek Government applied a strict quarantine lockdown within the Hotspots on the name of public health, which lasted far more than the general public lockdown.

Following the passage of LAW 4636/2019 matters have been compounded by the Greek State’s plans to turn the Hotspots and the surrounding areas into well-guarded ‘concentration camps’ with locked gates, multiple barren courtyards, and limited access to free movement. Detention translates to deprivation of rights, visibility and love.
Depriving children of liberty is depriving them of their right to be children. When this deprivation of liberty happens in the context of migration, where children are running away from persecution or away from conditions threatening their life, detention not only digs deeper into their existing wounds, but goes further in urgency, since it creates mistrust in humanity. And this trauma might be irreversible.

Since deprivation of liberty constitutes a form of structural violence against children, this very trauma shall be healed into the context of restorative justice, where institutions, justice and society come together to restore the child’s faith to humanity by treating them with dignity and respect. This constitutes one of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals that all states have committed to place at the heart of their policy actions.

"Detention of children for migration-related reasons cannot be enforced as a measure of last resort"

The UN Global Study on children deprived of Liberty reminds states that detention of children for migration-related reasons cannot be enforced as a measure of last resort and is never in line with the best interests of the child codified in Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The data collected for the purposes of this Study indicates that there are at least 330,000 children detained for migration-related purposes per year around the world.

The Study showed that all these children are exposed to the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation while at the same time they develop anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and post-traumatic stress disorder.

"Detention in the name of emergency, public or state sovereignty interests cannot be excused"

It goes without doubt that there is no valid justification based on moral and legal ethics to detain children. Detention in the name of emergency, public or state sovereignty interests cannot be excused. It is in times of emergency, such as a war condition that gives birth to millions of refugees or a pandemic, when humanity is tested hard.

It is then when states are expected not to compromise the absolute values forming their identity as a civilized state. Undoubtedly, not depriving children of their liberty is one of them.

However, it becomes all the more evident that detention in the context of migration has exceeded the typical norms. Locking children behind bars for the sake of their protection or placing them in overcrowded open-air prisons are some of the ways EU states deliberately have chosen to ‘welcome’ children on the move in recent years.

#NoChildrenBehindBars
The Children’s Rights Helpdesk of Defence for Children International (DCI) – Greece, has received more than 400 cases of refugee children deprived of their liberty in the last four years. Some of them remained detained for more than a year. DCI–Greece supported legally these children and released them from detention.

Advocacy on this issue has led to the abolishment of the Protective Custody Regime in the country. However, DCI–Greece is still monitoring its implementation and operates as a watchdog of the rights of children on the move. This paper reflects the data and information gathered from the work with these children. Names have been changed for protection purposes.

It is non-negotiable that transit or host countries have the obligation to follow another direction driven by the values enshrined in the text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and not to enforce children into harsher restrictions of their liberty.

Other EU states as well need to encourage these states following that path and support them proportionately. Otherwise, it will remain unconscionable that the international community has not adequately stood up for the fundamental rights of refugee children.

The world needs to give Amir and Fatima an answer, when they asked that ‘WHY’. And this answer needs to take the form of action where healing will meet justice and from that, as lesson learnt, to inspire states to exercise their creativity when managing migration in ways that will not create harm.

It is our responsibility that next time a child comes to EU soil and asks for a refugee in order to place their soul and integrity, detention will not be the best we can offer to them.

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THE UN GLOBAL STUDY ON CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY: PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

From the NGO Panel on Children Deprived of Liberty Co-chairs, Alex Kamarotos, DCI and Jo Becker HRW

The UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty (GSCDL) aims to shed light on the scale and conditions of children deprived of liberty, identify good practices and make recommendations for effective measures to prevent human rights violations against children in detention and reduce the number of children deprived of liberty.

It depicts the reality of child deprivation of liberty in different settings, ranging from migration-related contexts to children deprived of liberty in institutions, and includes cross-cutting themes such as disability and the gender dimension of this phenomena.

A group of nongovernmental organisations launched a campaign for the Study in March 2014.

They envisioned a Study to bridge the data gap on the unknown number of children deprived of liberty worldwide, raise awareness of children deprived of liberty, and contribute to positive changes in policies and practice in the way that two previous global studies —on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children (1996) and Violence Against Children (2006)— did. These civil society organisations formed the NGO Panel on Children Deprived of Liberty, co-chaired by Defence for Children International and Human Rights Watch, to call on governments and United Nations agencies to back the study.

The NGO Panel’s advocacy resulted in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 69/175 inviting the Secretary-General to commission “an in-depth global study on children deprived of liberty”.

In October 2016, Prof. Manfred Nowak (Austria) was appointed as Independent Expert to lead the Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty.
Children deprived of liberty are a largely invisible group of children, and the Study faced significant challenges in accurately depicting the nature and scope of the issue, due to gaps in data collection and dissemination. Nevertheless, the data and research collected by the Study, as well as its conclusions and recommendations, such as the promotion and effective implementation of alternatives to detention, have positioned it as a benchmark in the field.

Throughout the last two years, dissemination efforts of the Study’s findings and recommendations have mainly taken place through awareness raising initiatives and regional and national launches with the involvement of the NGO Panel. Examples of such efforts include the regional launches of the Global Study throughout 2020 in Ecuador, the Netherlands, Ethiopia, the Republic of Korea, Bangkok and to the European Parliament.

In April 2021, the Study was launched in Cambodia in an event that provided an opportunity to hear about the thoughts of Cambodian children deprived of liberty, the experiences of local organisations working in this field, and the renewed commitment of the Cambodian government.

These elements are necessary in order to initiate a national process of implementation based on the recommendations of the study. In July 2020, the NGO panel organised an online expert roundtable situating the implementation of the study’s recommendations in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic. The event was moderated by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Violence Against Children, Dr. Najat Maalla M’jid, and featured the participation of the UN inter-agency Task Force for the GSCDL and of the NGO Panel. These national and regional launches of the GSCDL provide an opportunity to discuss the main challenges in each context, what efforts are required to effectively implement the recommendations of the Study, and also provide a platform for dialogue, to share best practices and identify emerging trends.

The launches help to raise awareness on the importance of the matters addressed by the Study and on the urgency of implementing its recommendations.

In July 2021, almost two years after the presentation of the GSCDL at the United Nations General Assembly, the NGO Panel on Children Deprived of Liberty, along with Defence for Children International and Human Rights Watch, co-organised a webinar on “Solutions to Deprivation of Liberty, Integral Protection and Access to Justice for All Children”. The participants had the opportunity to hear from a varied roster of panellists, including practitioners, experts, state representatives, NGOs and youth representatives, and UN officials, including Dr. Maalla M’jid.

Despite the progress achieved thus far, the efforts initiated with the publication of the Global Study are not over. The presentation of the Global Study to the UN General Assembly in October 2019 paved the way for concrete steps that need to be taken now by all stakeholders but most of all by member states to continue the path towards the long-term reduction of the number of children deprived of liberty.

A UN General Assembly resolution reaffirming the leadership of the SRSG on Violence against Children in addressing children deprived of liberty will help maintain momentum around the study, and encourage implementation of its recommendations.

The NGO Panel is supporting a resolution that will also request a follow-up report of the Study to be presented at the UNGA in October 2022, three years after the presentation of the Study itself. Such a report will highlight progress made, continuing challenges, and spur additional action to end children’s deprivation of liberty.
I decided to become a lawyer when I was 15, after my brother was arrested and imprisoned by the Israeli military. Visiting him in prison was challenging, but I noticed my brother’s lawyer was able to meet with him individually, and even hug him. I wanted nothing more than to hug my brother. So, I attended law school in Algeria and returned to Palestine to defend Palestinian children arrested and detained by the Israeli military.

Since 1967, Israel has operated two separate legal systems in the same territory. In the occupied West Bank, Israeli settlers are subject to the civilian legal system whereas Palestinians live under military law. No Israeli child comes into contact with the military courts.

Israel has the dubious distinction of being the only country in the world that automatically and systematically prosecutes children in military courts. Each year, between 500 and 700 Palestinian children are tried in these courts, which, in practice and by design, deny fundamental fair trial rights and due process protections. This dual system offers no semblance of justice.

From the moment Palestinian children come into contact with Israeli soldiers, their very basic human rights are denied. The majority of Palestinian children report being blindfolded, strip-searched, and subjected to physical violence at the hands of Israeli forces.
Most Palestinian children are not informed of the reason for their arrest, and over half are forced to sign documents in Hebrew, a language they cannot read or understand.

The Israeli military court’s conviction rate is higher than 99 percent. When I represented child detainees in the Israeli military courts, my job as a lawyer guided by international law and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was to secure the child’s release as soon as possible. The longer a child spends in military detention, the more difficult it is to reintegrate into school and resume their life.

In 1991, Israel ratified the CRC, which stipulates that children should only be deprived of their liberty as a measure of last resort, must not be unlawfully or arbitrarily detained, and must not be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.

Despite Israel’s ratification of the CRC, Israeli forces target Palestinian children for arrest—in many cases, Palestinian children are detained multiple times.

One such child was Obaida Jawabra from Arroub refugee camp, near Hebron, who was 14 years old when my team at DCI-Palestine first represented him. Obaida was first arrested by Israeli forces on his way to the grocery store.

Soldiers blindfolded him, tied his hands behind his back, and accused him of throwing stones—the most common charge against Palestinian children in the military courts. Then he was taken to Etzion interrogation center, located inside an illegal Israeli settlement.

“I’ll beat you up and knock out your teeth if you don’t confess,” threatened the Israeli interrogator tasked with convincing Obaida to admit he was throwing stones. The interrogator forced Obaida to sign a document in Hebrew.
At a demonstration in Arroub refugee camp, where Obaida lived, Israeli forces killed him with a bullet to his chest. Obaida was 17 years old, just a few weeks shy of his 18th birthday.

"Israeli forces have brutally killed 73 Palestinian children this year"

As of August 30, Israeli forces have brutally killed 73 Palestinian children this year, according to our documentation. No one has been held accountable for their deaths, and it’s unlikely anyone ever will.

Israeli forces act with complete impunity knowing that there will not be consequences for unlawful killings and other serious breaches of international law. Until the international community holds perpetrators accountable, this will remain the reality for Palestinian children.

Palestinian children deserve better than what the world has offered them. They deserve a future free from violence, one where their dreams aren’t constrained by the Israeli military occupation. A liberated future, like Obaida dreamed of.

This year marks DCI-Palestine’s 30th anniversary.

For 30 years, we have defended Palestinian children in the Israeli military court system, connected them with psychological support after their release, trained children to document children’s rights violations in their communities, worked with duty bearers to create child-friendly systems and environments, and more. While this work is rewarding, I must admit it has not gotten any easier.
Our organisation faces increasing attacks and repression that make advocating for Palestinian children dangerous and difficult.

At the end of July 2021, Israeli paramilitary border police raided DCI-Palestine’s headquarters in Al-Bireh, just south of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, confiscating computers and child client files.

Responding to this raid and other attacks is an enormous task that takes valuable time away from working for Palestinian children’s rights.

Despite these continued attacks designed to divert our resources, crush our morale, and scare our international network of trusted partners, our team remains committed to defending the rights of Palestinian children like Obaida, who deserve a liberated future, not one that is violently taken away.
"Together, we can support children to become actors for justice and advocates for their rights"