

PRESS RELEASE #02/EN/2023

Geneva, Switzerland

20 November 2023 World Children's Day

Defence for Children International statement on children's rights in Palestine

On the occasion of the World Children's Day on 20 November 2023;

On the occasion of the prestigious [Rafto Prize 2023](#) for human rights defenders being awarded on 12 November 2023 to [Defence for Children International-Palestine](#) (DCI-P) for their persistent work to defend and promote the rights of children living in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt);

On the occasion of the forthcoming 35th anniversary of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), adopted at the UN General Assembly in New York on 20 November 1989; and

On the occasion of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's upcoming review of Israel¹;

DCI states:

[Defence for Children International \(DCI\)](#) stands with all children whose rights are violated and who are affected by armed conflict in the occupied Palestinian territory. DCI stands in solidarity with its member organisation Defence for Children International - Palestine (DCI-P) for its work over the last three decades to defend and promote the rights of Palestinian children.

Armed conflicts inflict profound harm upon children. Despite the protection that should be afforded to all children by international law, including their very right to survival, all too often, they are forcibly displaced, detained, killed, orphaned, maimed, attacked, abducted, injured, traumatised, made homeless and internally displaced, deprived of liberty, deprived of safety, deprived of medical care, food, and water, exploited, or otherwise drawn directly into conflict. The repercussions extend to those who survive but endure the loss of parents, family members, friends, and bear witness to catastrophic events.

All children affected by armed conflicts must enjoy full protection and care. in compliance with the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and its Optional Protocols (particularly the [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict \(2002\)](#)) and other relevant international standards as laid down in international humanitarian law, to enjoy their inherent right to life and be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity. Furthermore, as reiterated in article 38 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) establishes clear rules, including on the obligation to ensure protection and care of children.

¹ The review of Israel was to take place in the [95th Session from January to February 2024](#), but has recently been postponed at the request of Israel.

Palestinian children have been experiencing serious children's rights violations since 1948, when thousands of Palestinians were killed, and many hundreds of thousands were expelled from their homes and lands (the Nakba or Catastrophe). Millions of their descendants have been refugees since. In the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel over the last 50 years, Palestinian children are systematically oppressed and persecuted by the Israeli authorities. Palestinian children's rights are violated by unchecked and ever-expanding settler colonialism and the international crime against humanity of apartheid. Children in Gaza have been living in an open-air prison for the last 18 years, because of the Israeli suffocating land, sea, and air blockade of Gaza. Between 2005 and 7 October 2023, six major military offensives in Gaza killed at least 1,000 Palestinian children. Between 2011 and the end of 2020, in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, 781 Palestinian children were killed by Israeli military and police forces, colonial settlers, and private security guards. Since 2000, Israeli military authorities have detained, interrogated, prosecuted, and imprisoned approximately 13,000 Palestinian children.

On 7 October 2023, Hamas carried out unconscionable attacks in Israel, including against children. Since then, violations of the rights of Palestinian children by the Israeli military have been catastrophic and many entities have sounded alarm bells about the very real risk of genocide in Gaza. On 16 November 2023, UN experts called on the international community to prevent genocide against the Palestinian people.

Since 7 October 2023 (according to [UNOCHA](#) and [DCI-P](#) figures): in Israel as of 18 November 2023, there were an identified 31 children killed (out of a total of 1,162 persons killed). As of 18 November, the Israeli bombing of homes, residential buildings, schools and hospitals have resulted in the killing of over 4,900 Palestinian children (out of 11,800 persons) in Gaza. Additional children are unaccounted for, and 1,800 children are missing under the rubble of destroyed buildings, indicating that the true death toll is much higher. Over 1,165 families have suffered multiple fatalities; some entire multigenerational families have been wiped out. A new acronym has been coined – WCNSF – wounded child no surviving family – to cover an ever-increasing number of children in Gaza. One-million-six-hundred-thousand people are internally displaced and hundreds of thousands of people who are unable or unwilling to move south, remain in North Gaza under intense military fire. Now, 625,000 students in Gaza have no access to education. At least 45% of homes in Gaza have been destroyed and winter is approaching. Hospitals, schools, universities, mosques, and churches have been destroyed or bomb-damaged, with at least 51% of education facilities hit. There has been a full electricity blackout for 38 days. In the occupied West Bank, 200 Palestinians, including 54 children have been killed by Israeli forces, in addition to eight Palestinians, including one child, killed by Israeli settlers. Unfortunately, these figures are subject to daily changes - see [here](#) for general updates on casualties in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel, and [DCI-Palestine](#) for updates specifically on children in Gaza and the West Bank.

DCI strongly condemns:

- The killing of civilians and children by all parties to this conflict and all violations of International Humanitarian Law.
- Israel's indiscriminate military response against the Palestinian people of Gaza, comprising over 2.3 million people, nearly half of whom are children, their forced internal displacement, with no guarantees of safety or return, deliberate deprivation of access to food, water, medical care and supplies, and energy (including to run hospitals and medical devices), as well as the imposed communications blackouts.
- The bombing and destruction of the entire fabric of Gazan life including hospitals, schools, universities, mosques, churches, and bakeries in Gaza.

- The use by parties to the conflict, commentators, media, etc. of dehumanising language for human beings and the failure to recognise the equal value of each and every human life.
- The appalling heavy military assaults and forced evacuation of hospitals including intensive care patients and medical personnel at gunpoint, which amounts to the death of many people.

DCI calls for:

1. **An immediate and permanent ceasefire, to be monitored by an independent international body.**
2. **An immediate end to violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including children's rights violations. All those responsible for the indiscriminate attacks and other war crimes against civilians, including children, must be held criminally accountable and seen to be held accountable.**
3. **A new accountability system to be put in place to end impunity for these crimes and to prevent future atrocities.**
4. **Immediate humanitarian assistance for all internally displaced civilians, with special attention to the specific rights and needs of children.**
5. **The immediate release of all civilian hostages taken by Hamas.**
6. **The immediate release of all Palestinian civilians, including children, arbitrarily detained by Israel.²**
7. **The mobilisation of all relevant international human rights procedures and bodies. DCI calls for a Special Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council to provide the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem with enhanced resources and capacity to effectively carry out an in-depth, war crime-focused investigation into the current situation, to include a special focus on children.**
8. **Urgent humanitarian aid to ensure adequate shelter, food, water, and protection – the means of life. The provision of supports (machinery and specialised disaster recovery teams) to recover the bodies of men, women, and children under the rubble in Gaza, to identify the remains and to ensure they are afforded a dignified burial.**
9. **All parties, and the international community, must step up and commit to reparations and recovery for all those affected, including children. This assistance should extend beyond immediate necessities like reconstruction, encompassing compensation and the necessary urgent supports to start processing and mitigating the harm inflicted on individuals, including the enduring effects of intergenerational trauma.**
10. **Special protection and care to be assured for the orphaned and/or wounded children with no surviving family.**
11. **A renewed commitment by all parties and the international community, including individual states and regional organisations, to put an end to the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory, and respect for the Palestinians' right to self-determination by recognition of the State of Palestine.**

² Approximately 9,000 Palestinians are currently detained. Since 7 October, around 80% of adults and children arrested are in administrative detention (i.e. without any charge).

12. The tolerance or even encouragement of war crimes and violations of International Humanitarian Law, (including through the sale of arms or military aid) to be acknowledged as a collective and indelible stain on the international community.
13. The States which declare themselves to be steadfast partners or allies of Israel, irrespective of violations of children's rights, war crimes and crimes against humanity, to hold Israel to the same standards as all other nations and themselves to be held accountable for their participation in war crimes, violations of human rights and genocide.

Resources

- For a particular focus on children and to learn more about their work, visit [Defence for Children International Palestine's website](#)
- For humanitarian news and updates, visit [UN OCHA/opt](#)
- [The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- Support two [calls for a ceasefire](#) : [change.org](#) and [Amnesty International](#)
- 2021 and 2022 reports on apartheid: [12 January 2021 B'Tselem](#) - [27 April 2021 Human Rights Watch](#) - [1 February 2022 Amnesty International](#)
- [5 September 2023 Report](#): UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel
- [13 October 2023 Statement of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#): grave violations of children's rights in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory
- 18 October 2023: *Opinio Juris* is the world's first blog dedicated to the informed discussion of international law by and among academics, and legal experts. The contributors aim to analyse international law where it is most controversial and ambiguous. These scholars and practitioners of international law, conflict studies and genocide studies, [we] are compelled to [sound the alarm about the possibility of the crime of genocide being perpetrated by Israeli forces against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip](#).
- 19 October 2023: UN experts decried the bombing of hospitals and schools as crimes against humanity, and [called for the prevention of genocide](#). Other bodies also sounded alarm bells about the possibility of the crime of genocide.
- 20 October 2023 (not covering events after 7 October): [Situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967](#), report from the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967
- [29 October 2023 press release Save the Children](#) comparing the number of children killed in Gaza in three weeks to the number of children killed in global conflict zones since 2019
- [1 November 2023 Statement](#): UN Committee on the Rights of the Child condemns the killing of children in Gaza
- [1 November CRIN Statement](#): children's rights in Palestine and Israel
- [2 November 2023 UN Special Procedures press release warning](#): need for a ceasefire to prevent genocide
- 13 November 2023: [Lawsuit against the US government for failure to prevent genocide](#)
- [16 November 2023: UN warning of immediate possibility of starvation for Gazans](#)
- [Who Arms Israel? \(workersinpalestine.org\)](#)
- 16 November 2023: [Gaza: UN experts call on international community to prevent genocide against the Palestinian people](#)
- [Gaza Water 2023 — Visualizing Palestine](#)

Defence for Children International (DCI) is a leading child-rights focused and membership-based grassroots Movement, founded in 1979, the first International Year of the Child. DCI promotes and protects children's rights at the local, national, regional and international levels. DCI co-drafted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

DCI has special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO, the Council of Europe, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, the League for Arab States and maintains close relations with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

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AND AROUND THE WORLD**

