

2024 Conference of CSOs working on the Question of Palestine
“Building Bridges with International Civil Society to Address the Ongoing Nakba”

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Let me start with the voices of the voiceless Palestinian children trapped in Gaza during this insane aggression and genocide.

A journalist interviewed an eight-year-old child in Gaza. The journalist asked the child why you are upset. The child answered they destroyed our home. The journalist responded so what? you will build a new one. The child responded, but they killed my father. The journalist responded you should be proud... your father is a martyr. The child responded, they killed my mother too. At this point, the journalist run out of words.

This is the reality lived by Palestinian children in Gaza now. They are not free from fear and want, because of the Israeli practices that starkly violate all IHL principles and standards. On the contrary violating these principles and standards become part of the Israeli military strategy employed in Gaza during this military assault.

It is important to stress the fact that the Israeli Palestinian conflict started years before October 7, 2023. During this period Palestinian people, among them children, under Israeli occupation suffered from systematic human rights violations, discrimination, oppression and the policies of an apartheid regime.

During the 17 years that preceded October 7. 2023 Palestinian children have often paid the highest price in Israel's repeated military offensives in the Gaza Strip, while also suffering from a human-made humanitarian crisis created by Israel's nearly 17-yearlong blockade of Gaza. Closure policies compounded by repeated military offensives have hindered any meaningful efforts toward implementing comprehensive protections for Palestinian children living in the Gaza Strip.

Israel's 17-yearlong near-total closure of the Gaza Strip has largely cut its residents off from the rest of the world, with freedom of movement denied to approximately

2.1 million residents, resulting in the denial of fundamental human rights, including the right to work; to health; to obtain an education; to physical security; to adequate food, water, and housing; and to family life. Israeli policies and actions have created and perpetuated an entirely human-made humanitarian disaster with grave consequences for Palestinians living in what is one of the most densely populated areas in the world.

Since Israeli authorities first implemented closure policies toward the Gaza Strip in 2007, Israel has undertaken several major military offensives in the Gaza Strip, which collectively left over 1,165 Palestinian children dead, and thousands more Palestinian children injured or disabled. Let alone the psychological implications on children as a result of living under constant shelling and bombardment to their homes during these military offensives.

During nearly eight decades of violence, discrimination, oppression and subjugation Israel as an occupying power enjoyed impunity and was not held to account for its record of human rights violations. When the Palestinian people rise up to push back, resist, break the chains the world woke up, but this time not to protect the oppressed, the discriminated against, the subjugated but to call for the right of the occupier state to defend itself. This support and complicity from many governments around the world give the green light for Israel to continue its atrocities and crimes against besieged people in Gaza.

Palestinian people, like any other people around the world have the right to self-determination; resist occupation, discrimination and oppression.

In Gaza now as a result of the intense shelling and bombardment which led to the killing of whole families' doctors' coined new acronym WCNFS which stands for wounded child no family survive.

Because of the prevention of the flow of humanitarian assistance, people in Gaza among them children are starving to death. Who survived the intensive airstrikes and shillings will die because of the lack of food and drinkable water. Israel is using food as a weapon against civilians in Gaza.

In Gaza and North Gaza, as a standard operational procedure, Israeli army target people who are waiting to receive lifesaving food, which led to the killing of hundreds of people.

Since the beginning of the Israeli aggression, more than 13,000 Palestinian children in Gaza were killed by the Israeli military over the past six months. 27 children were starved to death due to Israel's block of food, water and electricity to Gaza. More than 17,000 Palestinian children in Gaza are now orphaned because their families were killed. In the occupied West Bank 113 children were killed by the Israeli military and settlers since October 2023 and hundreds have been arrested by Israeli forces, with documented cases of starvation, abuse and inhumane treatment.

These are all gross violations by Israel of international humanitarian and human rights laws and have relentlessly continued despite the International Court of Justice ruling on 26 January 2024, which affirmed the plausible risk that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza under the 1948 Genocide Convention, and order for Israel to take all measures to prevent genocidal acts.

And now, Israel is threatening a full-scale ground invasion in Rafah with 1.5 million Palestinians sheltering there. They have nowhere to go for safety.

The only way to stop this genocide is a PERMANENT CEASEFIRE NOW.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem the situation is not better. Children in the occupied West Bank, still suffer from violations to their all rights enshrined in International human rights treaties mainly the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Hundreds of children every year are tortured and prosecuted in military courts that lacks fair trial guarantees. During their arrest and interrogation, they are exposed to different types of ill-treatment and torture, to extract confessions from them to be used in the military courts as the primary evidence against them.

In the West Bank, the Israeli military and settlers violate children right to life. In 2023 DCIP documented the killing of 121 Palestinian children, 81 of them were killed after October 7. This year so far DCIP documented the killing of 32 children.

In the West Bank, each year, Israeli forces detain between 500 and 700 Palestinian children and prosecute them in military courts.

Children typically arrive at interrogation bound, blindfolded, frightened, and sleep-deprived. Children often give confessions after verbal abuse, threats, physical and psychological violence that in some cases amounts to torture.

Israeli military law provides no right to legal counsel during interrogation, and Israeli military court judges seldom exclude confessions obtained by coercion or torture.

From testimonies of 75 Palestinian children detained by Israeli forces from the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, DCIP found that:

- 61 percent experienced physical violence following arrest
- 96 percent were hand-tied
- 88 percent were blindfolded
- 47 percent were detained from their homes in the middle of the night
- 69 percent faced verbal abuse, humiliation, or intimidation
- 65 percent were subject to at least one strip search
- 71 percent were denied adequate food and water
- 65 percent of children were not properly informed of their rights
- 97 percent were interrogated without the presence of a family member
- 95 percent were not informed of the reason for their arrest
- 37 percent were subject to stress positions
- 43 percent were shown or signed documents in Hebrew, a language most Palestinian children don't understand
- 24 percent were isolated in solitary confinement for two or more days

The average amount of time that a Palestinian child detainee was isolated in solitary confinement in 2023 was 26 days, according to evidence collected by DCIP. The longest period of solitary confinement documented by DCIP was 40 days in 2023.

Since the beginning of 2023 Israeli authorities escalated the use of administrative detention against Palestinian children, according to documentation collected by DCIP. At this time more than one third of the child prisoners are placed under administrative detention orders. Administrative detention is a form of imprisonment

without charge or trial regularly used by Israeli authorities to arbitrarily detain Palestinians, including children. Palestinian children held under administrative detention orders are not presented with charges, and their detention is based on secret evidence that is neither disclosed to the child nor their attorney, preventing them from preparing a legal challenge to the detention and its alleged basis.

Israeli forces escalated arrest operations throughout the occupied West Bank after October 7, arresting more than 400 Palestinian children to interrogate, prosecute, and imprison in the Israeli military detention system, according to estimates by DCIP.

Since October 7, the Israeli authorities restricted lawyers' visits to prisoners in Israeli prisons and suspended family visits.

Children from Gaza are detained in undisclosed prison facilities, with the precise locations kept secret. The Israeli authorities prohibit the disclosure of any information about where children from Gaza are incarcerated, their numbers, whereabouts and whether they are died or alive.

As a result of all these crimes that are being committed by Israel in full view of the world without it doing anything to put an end to this tragedy, all the standards and values of international humanitarian law and international human rights law are at stake.

The impunity that Israel enjoyed and the international community's failure to hold it accountable for its previous crimes constituted the green light to commit additional crimes. The international community should stop the carnage against Palestinian children in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

It is true as stated in article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that: all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. However, it is truer also, as George Orwell said that all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.

As humans, Gaza should be our moral compass.